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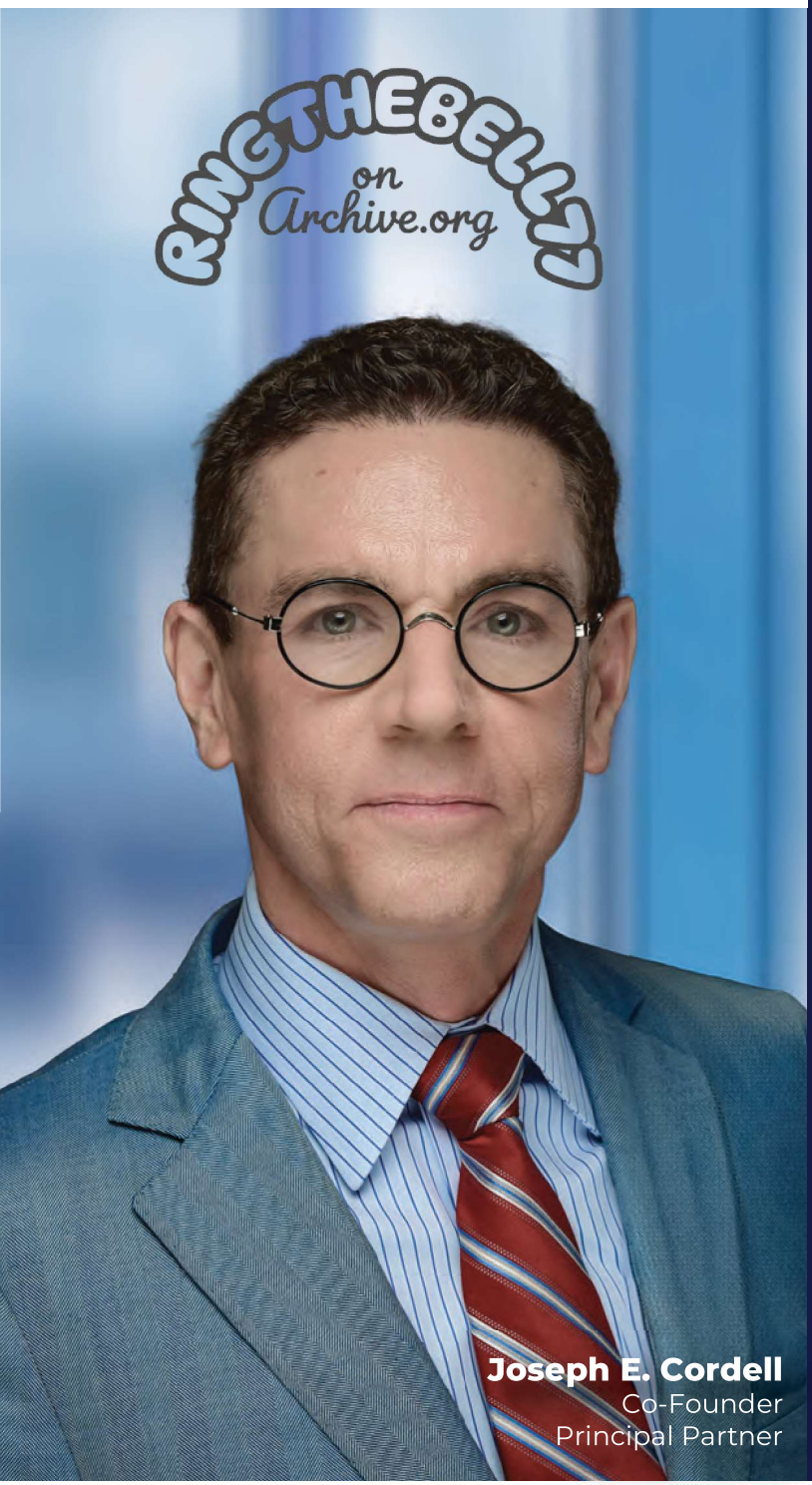

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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5 **Two Cardinals, Two Legends**

12 **The Best of Yadier Molina**

20 **Albert Pujols' Greatest Hits**

30 **A Toast to Y2K**

56 **Something Old, Something New**

74 **Celebration Day**

82 **Looking Back: 2006 World Series**

105 **The Future is Here**

113 **Team Photo Gallery**

167 **Coaching Staff**

170 **Broadcasters**

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TWO CARDINALS. TWO LEGENDS.

By Michael Bradley

TWO CARDINALS. TWO LEGENDS.

It is not at all uncommon for a Major League Baseball franchise to have a singular, Hall of Fame talent on its roster for a decade or more. The sport's history is filled with standouts.

But two at one time? That's rare. And special.

From 2004-11 — and then again in 2022 — St. Louis fans were able to enjoy two of the best ever at their positions — on the same roster. First baseman Albert Pujols and catcher Yadier Molina were stalwarts on Cardinals teams that won two World Series titles and played in another Fall Classic. During that stretch, the Cards won four NL Central titles. When Pujols rejoined the team in 2022, they won another. And Molina was part of four division championship teams after the slugging first baseman left in free agency.

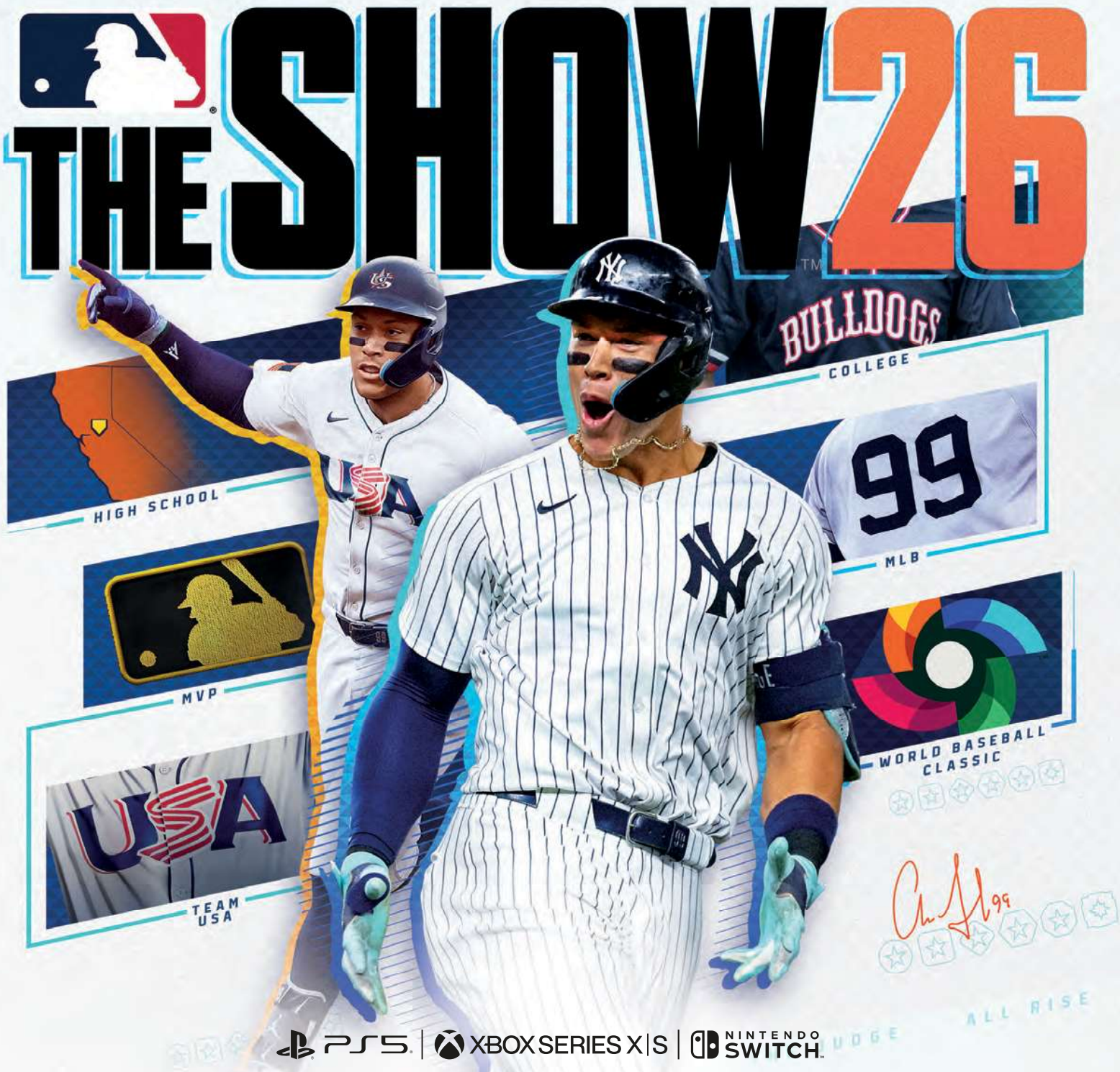
They starred at the plate, in the field and in important situations. And they formed the majors' most lethal pickoff tandem that nailed 39 unsuspecting runners at first base during their time together in St. Louis.

"Albert likes to compete; he likes to win," Molina says. "I do, too. When you combine two smart players trying to win, we're going to find a way to get you."

Now, the two will be linked even more closely, as they join luminaries like Stan Musial, Bob Gibson, Lou Brock, Dizzy Dean, Ozzie Smith and dozens of others in the franchise's Hall of Fame. It's a fitting honor for two of the greatest Cardinals and two MLB greats.

Molina spent his entire 19-year career behind the plate in St. Louis, anchoring the team with his tremendous defensive prowess (nine Gold Gloves) and production at the plate (2,168 hits). Pujols played his first 11 MLB seasons (2001-11) with St. Louis, during which time he amassed nine All-Star nods, before heading to Southern California in free agency. In 2022 he returned for his final season and earned another All-Star berth, during a season when he surged past 700 career home runs and finished with 703.

This honor is a stop on the stars' paths to Cooperstown, where they will join other Cardinals greats in the Baseball Hall of Fame. They will be enshrined in the Cardinals Hall of Fame, along with 1926 World Series champion pitcher Bill Sherdel, during a ceremony planned for Sept. 12 at Busch Stadium. The new inductees will join an elite group now consisting of 61 members whose exceptional careers and



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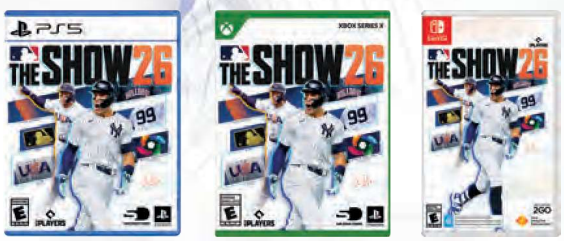

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TWO CARDINALS. TWO LEGENDS.

significant achievements have helped make the Cardinals a premier MLB franchise.

Molina always stood out for his love of the game and commitment to the team.

"He has a rare mix of childlike joy when he is playing, combined with warrior-mentality toughness, and all wrapped up with top-tier skills, relentless drive for improvement and a desire to win," says Mike Matheny, who played for the Cards (2000-04) and managed the club from 2012-18. "I would say that's amazing."

Molina was born in Puerto Rico and developed into a major league prospect thanks in large part to his father, Benjamin, who worked with him and his brothers — Bengie and Jose — every day after work. The Cardinals chose him in the fourth round of the 2000 draft, and after four minor league seasons, Molina made his MLB debut after Matheny went on the injured list with a sore rib.

His first season consisted of 51 games and a .267 batting average, hardly remarkable numbers, but the performance was certainly enough to convince the Cardinals he should be their everyday catcher in 2005. As it turned out, they had their catcher for the next 18 seasons. And Molina had a home.

"In 2004, when I got called up, I saw how they treated Mike Matheny, the love they brought to Mike," Molina says. "Then, in '05, they lost Mike, a real good guy who had won three Gold Gloves, they still trusted me. There were never boos. They lost a three-time Gold Glove guy, but still I was received with open arms, the young guy."

Molina's first few full seasons weren't overwhelming, but he was still in his mid-20s, and it takes time for catchers to learn the job. Of course, he did show he knew what he was doing in the 2006 World Series, when he hit .412 and had an OPS of 1.029 to help the Cardinals win the title.

"When I think of Yadier Molina, I think, 'He's a winner,'" says former Giants catcher Buster Posey. "That's how he influenced the game. I remember watching Yadi when the Cardinals won the World Series in '06. I was a freshman in college going into my sophomore year. That's when I took notice of him. I made the transition to catching that fall, so he was someone I watched as I tried to learn the position.

"And for me, he's also a no-doubt Hall of Famer. His contributions to the game, how much he's won, the consistency behind the plate. I'm still amazed."

By 2008, Molina clearly understood what was going on. He won his first Gold Glove and hit a career-best .304, a huge number for a catcher. The next season, he began a run of seven straight All-Star appearances, and he won Gold Gloves in each season. Molina had established himself as one of MLB's best.

During that stretch, Molina posted some career bests and finished among the top four in National League Most Valuable Player voting twice. In 2012, he slugged 22 homers, his highest total ever, and hit .315. That earned him fourth place in the MVP balloting. A year later, he hit .319, his best, knocked in 80 runs and finished third among MVP candidates, his highest placing.

Molina's hitting statistics were impressive, but his skills behind the plate were even better. His tremendous defensive abilities were reflected in the Gold Gloves he won, but Molina was also expert at handling pitchers, throwing out runners at a high level and was great at blocking errant pitches.

"Every one of his tools is a 10," says former Cardinals manager Tony La Russa. "Receiving, blocking, throwing strength and accuracy, offense, all of them. He is a catcher without a weakness."

Molina was regarded even more highly for his toughness. Catchers by nature have to be rugged, thanks to the abuse they take when hit by foul balls, while chasing errant pitches and during plays at the plate. From 2009-17, Molina caught fewer than 136 games per season only once.

"I saw the guy get hit every place you can imagine and never heard him complain," says Adam Wainwright, who pitched for the Cards from 2005-23. "Not one time, ever. One time, we were watching TV in the video room, and there was a play when Yadier got hit right in the mask. A little later, he got it in the kneecap. I turned to [former Cardinals second baseman Jedd Gyorko] and said, 'What do you think this guy is going to feel like when he's 60 years old?'

"And Jedd goes, 'I don't know. He's probably going to catch 135 games.'"

One of the things Molina was expert at was picking runners off first base. In 19 years, he nailed 69 players during the regular season, and his preferred pickoff partner was Pujols, who teamed with him 39 times. Pujols generally sent Molina a signal that he wanted a throw, and the rifle-armed catcher usually delivered a seed that caught a runner who had strayed too far from the base.

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TWO CARDINALS. TWO LEGENDS.

"It did not matter the situation, bases loaded or nobody out," Pujols says. "You give us an opportunity, we're going to pick your butt off. And that's what we did. He always put it right on the money."

Pujols was worth plenty to the Cardinals during his two stints with the team. He is best known for the first 11 years of his career, which he spent in St. Louis and established himself as one of baseball's premier sluggers — if not the best.

Pujols was born in the Dominican Republic and moved with his family to New York when he was 16. But after witnessing a tragedy, he moved again, this time to Missouri.

Somehow, Pujols was not drafted until the 13th round in 1999, even after he hit .461 with 22 homers in his only season at Maple Woods Community College in Missouri. Pujols spent one season in the minors and jumped from A ball to the Triple-A ranks by the end of the year. In 2001, he had one of the greatest rookie seasons ever. Pujols hit .329, slugged 37 homers and drove in 130 runs, while posting an OPS of 1.013. Of course he was voted Rookie of the Year and also was named an All-Star.

Pujols became just the second player at the time (Ted Williams was the other, and Jose Abreu did it later) to post a .300 average, hit 30 or more homers and knock in at least 100 runs as a rookie. That was impressive. That he did it in each of his first 10 seasons is borderline ridiculous and an accomplishment no one else ever matched. During his 11 years in St. Louis, "The Machine" led the league in homers twice, with a high of 49 in 2006. He was tops in runs scored five times, RBIs once and doubles once. In 2003, he scored 137 times, had 212 hits and registered 51 doubles, all career highs and all tops in the NL. From 2005-10, he was the National League leader in WAR. He was named NL MVP in 2005, '08 and '09.

In the 2011 World Series win over Texas, Pujols slugged three homers in one game and scored eight runs. That followed a brilliant NLCS performance against Milwaukee, when he hit .478 and had a 1.469 OPS.

"Seldom does a player come along and change the entire trajectory of a franchise, and it's probably unprecedented when that player is drafted with the 402nd pick and spends just one season in the minors," said then-president of baseball operations John Mozeliak. "But Albert Pujols did just that with the Cardinals."

When Pujols signed a record-breaking 10-year free agent deal with the Angels after the 2011 season, Cardinals fans were understandably crushed. One of the franchise's all-time heroes was moving on, and all that remained were the memories.

"Albert is a great champion, and we will always be thankful for his many achievements in a Cardinals uniform, as well as his contributions to the St. Louis community," said team chairman and CEO Bill DeWitt Jr. at the time.

But Pujols would be back. In late March of 2022, Pujols signed a one-year deal with the Cardinals. He had been a role player with the Angels and Dodgers the year before, although his presence in the Dodger clubhouse had been extremely positive for a team that reached the NLCS. Pujols had spent the offseason working out in the Dominican Republic, with the hopes of playing another season, and he was coming home.

After Pujols had a relatively pedestrian 2021 campaign with the Angels and Dodgers, during which he launched just 17 homers, knocked in 50 runs and hit .236, some thought he was coming back to St. Louis for a farewell tour. But instead of fading, he hit .270, his highest average in eight years, and had an OPS of .895, which was his best in 11 seasons. Most importantly, Pujols slugged 24 homers, including his 700th career round-tripper, on Sept. 23, against — of all teams — the Dodgers.

In the third inning, he hit a 434-footer to left-center for his 699th homer. An inning later, he tagged a hanging slider from Phil Bickford and became the fourth member of the 700-homer club, joining Babe Ruth, Hank Aaron and Barry Bonds.

"It's pretty special," Pujols said after the game. "When it's really gonna hit me is when I'm done, at the end of the season, when I'm retired, and probably a moment or two after that I can look at the numbers."

It was indeed special, for Pujols and the Cardinals. And for Molina, who was able to spend one more season with his long-time teammate. At the end of the 2022 campaign, both St. Louis legends retired. It was fitting. It was perfect.

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Eighteen-plus years after he showed up during a June 2004 series at Pittsburgh, Molina bowed out for a pinch-runner after a single in his final at-bat of the 2022 postseason.

PRESENTING THE BEST OF YADIER MOLINA

OUR FAVORITES FROM A CAREER CARDINAL WHOSE TALENT, INTELLIGENCE, TOUGHNESS AND LONGEVITY CEMENTED HIS LEGACY IN THE GAME AND THE FRANCHISE

Much was made of Albert Pujols coming home in 2022 to finish his career. And what a magical final chapter Pujols penned, a storybook ending Cardinals Nation will always remember.

But never forget this: Yadier Molina, also playing his last year, never left.

For 19 seasons, he wore the Birds on the Bat. Only Stan Musial played longer exclusively as a Cardinal.

In 2015, *Cardinals Magazine* featured a close-up of Molina on the cover of an issue with these words: "Face of the franchise." That season, the Cardinals won 100 games for the first time since 2005, the year the catcher took over full-time at his position.

Ted Simmons, the classy and cerebral Hall of Famer who caught in 13 seasons in St. Louis, offered his opinion of Molina's value in that issue's cover story. He said it as succinctly and superbly as anyone ever has.

"He could be the pitching coach, he could be the hitting coach and he could be the manager of that team — and he could still be the catcher," Simmons stated. "He is that aware of everything that goes on in the game."

Four years later, *Cardinals Yearbook* celebrated Molina on the occasion of his 15th anniversary with the club, packing the publication with his career highlights to that point.

Of course, he continued to create more.

Some of them have been "shared" highlights, in the spirit of Yadi's team-centric attitude: he and Adam Wainwright combining for an MLB-record 325 career starts in 2022 (they'd finish with 328), or Yadi and Albert exchanging jerseys after Pujols returned to St. Louis, with the Angels, in 2019 for the first time since leaving.

But these pages, right here, are about Yadi.

Ten of our favorite highlights over Yadi's 19 years are included here, but, no doubt, every fan holds her or his own memories of the player who even at 40 embodied his "Yadi" moniker because it perfectly fit a grown man who remained a boy of summer for so long.

So, let's hear it for No. 4: two-time World Series champion, 2018 Roberto Clemente Award winner and future Hall of Famer. We'll never see another like him at catcher for the Cardinals.

THAT'S A BIG 10-4

Slaying Shea
Oct. 19, 2006

We'd learn over his career that Molina loved to swing at the first pitch. Mets reliever Aaron Heilman learned in the ninth inning of Game 7 in the NLCS.

The righty batter launched Heilman's middle-in changeup into the left-field bullpen at Shea Stadium for a two-run homer and a 3-1 Cardinals lead. It marked his second home run in four games (he would hit just four total in 104 career postseason tilts).

Molina had batted .216 during his second full season – worst among 19 catchers with at least 100 games. But in the postseason, he led Cardinals regulars with a combined .358 average during their three-series march that ended with a World Series championship.

He'd show off smarts beyond his years in the bottom of the inning. With two outs and the bases full of Mets, he convinced rookie closer Adam Wainwright to throw a changeup – his fourth-best pitch – on the first pitch to slugger Carlos Beltran. Fooled, Beltran took it for strike one. He then fouled off a curveball, and Yadi surprised Beltran again, calling for another curve that froze him and clinched the pennant.

Take a seat, Chase
Oct. 7, 2011

Our humble suggestion for one line that should be engraved on Molina's plaque when he's recognized in Cooperstown:

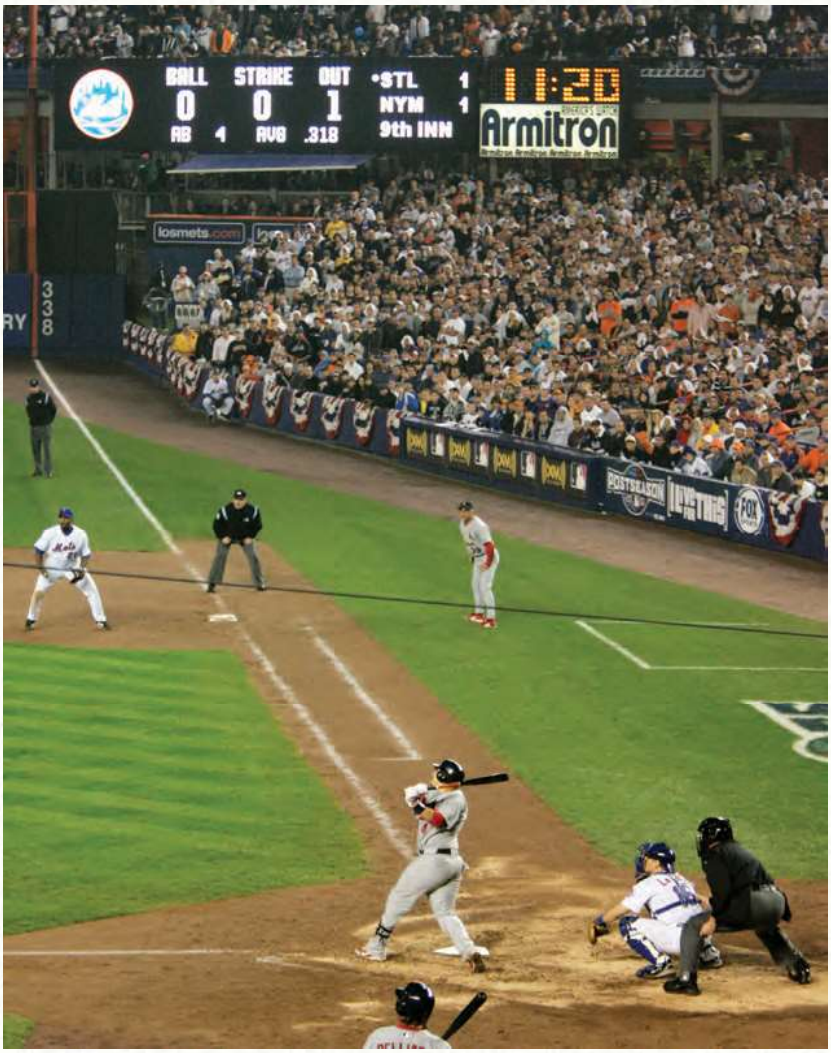
"You don't run on Yadi."

Not in the regular season. Not in the postseason. Not ever.

This October classic was winner-take-all, NLDS Game 5 in Philadelphia, with Chris Carpenter and the Cards holding a one-run lead over Roy Halladay and the Phils in a dandy of a duel.

When Chase Utley reached on a one-out single in the sixth, everyone asked the question: Would he dare test Molina's arm? Utley was 14-for-14 in steals in the regular season and 73 of 78 over the last five years. And he didn't waste any time, digging for second on the first pitch after getting an excellent jump on a 73-mph curve by Carp. Just when it appeared he'd swipe the bag, a missile from Molina landed in the glove of Nick Punto, who snapped the tag for the out.

The underdog Cards prevailed 1-0 in the first of three series that culminated with a world championship.



Simply stated, Molina's throw was still the best and most significant of his career.

Messin' with Manny
Oct. 27, 2004

We'll remember Molina for catching countless runners trying to steal bases. But how about the time he likely "caught" one of the game's best players stealing signs?

Manny Ramirez would win MVP of the '04 World Series, but before Game 4 was done, the 32-year-old got an earful from Molina, a brash rookie at 22.

Making his first World Series start, Yadi noticed Ramirez, after reaching base, apparently stealing his signs and relaying them to Boston cleanup man David Ortiz. When Ramirez approached the batter's box in the fourth inning, Molina stood nose-to-nose with the slugger and skewered him in Spanish.

Mike Matheny had advised Molina to make sure Ramirez knew he was onto him, but even the veteran Cards catcher admitted afterward, "That's probably not what I would have done … but that will work."

Years later, Yadi told *Cardinals Yearbook* he and Ramirez enjoy a good relationship, though Manny still professes innocence. "I tell him, 'I'm not crazy,'" Molina assured.

The message a young Yadi sent that night – he wouldn't back down from anyone – resonated over the years with the likes of Brandon Phillips, Adrian Gonzalez and even a manager (yes, you, Torey Lovullo).

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THAT'S A BIG 10-4

Pic and a poke

July 11, 2017

Named an All-Star for the eighth of 10 times in his career, Molina took three shots in this Midsummer Classic at Miami – one with his bat and two with a cellphone.

Molina, sporting a glossy gold helmet and chest protector from Rawlings to honor his eight Gold Gloves, entered to catch in the top of the sixth. As Nelson Cruz came to bat with two outs, he also brought along his phone and asked Yadi to snap a couple photos of the hitter with plate umpire Joe West. The "Cowboy" had recently worked his 5,000th major league game.

"That was weird, huh," admitted Molina, who nevertheless obliged.

In the bottom of the inning, Yadi blasted his first All-Star Game homer and the first by a Cardinal in over four decades (Reggie Smith, 1974). Two days shy of turning 35, he became the oldest catcher to go deep in an All-Star Game, passing St. Louis native Yogi Berra.

The drive off Minnesota's Ervin Santana tied the score and produced the only run for the National League in a 2-1 loss. Leave it to Yadi to homer for his last career hit in an All-Star Game (5-for-9 overall). He singled in his first, in 2009 at St. Louis.

No doubts: 2,000 hits

Sept. 24, 2020

All catch, no hit?

Early in Molina's career, few figured he had the hitting chops to become an offensive threat. Heck, Tony La Russa contended early one season that he didn't care if the catcher went hitless the entire year. Yadi, of course, cared very much.

So, maybe it was only fitting (though also unfortunate) that few witnessed him achieving his 2,000th career hit. Literally. The pandemic of 2020 prevented fans from watching in the stands.

Can you imagine the outpouring No. 4 would've received at Busch Stadium after he singled in the seventh inning vs. the Brewers to go 2K with the bat? Molina became just the sixth Cardinal to reach that total, and joined Yogi Berra and Johnny Bench as the only catchers in MLB to play 2,000 games and collect 2,000 hits with the same club.

At least his teammates were there to lend a hand with a standing ovation.

Molina reiterated that those in the media who doubted him as a young hitter provided motivation. He also confessed that while the team and winning always come first, "It was on my mind to get that (hit) this year wearing this uniform, because you never know what's going to happen."

Something good, as it turned out: The free-agent-to-be returned in 2021.

Prodigious in the postseason

Oct. 1, 2020

If Molina isn't the best catcher ever to play the game, he's a close second to fellow countryman Ivan Rodriguez. One place Yadi outpaced "Pudge" – in the postseason.

The Cards catcher became the first NL player in history to pile up 100 postseason appearances, that century mark coming in Game 2 of the 2020 Wild Card Series in San Diego, and one of only four to do so with the same team. (The others, no surprise, are Yankees: Derek Jeter, Jorge Posada and Bernie Williams.)

Molina also collected a pair of hits, the second off former teammate Trevor Rosenthal in the ninth, to bump his career total to 100. Only four others own more postseason hits overall.

It's no knock on Pudge that his teams weren't as successful, but still worth noting that he played in only 40 postseason games and totaled 39 hits.

Yadi finished his career with 102 postseason hits, the last on his final at-bat in the majors. He stroked a two-out, two-strike single the opposite way, where his hits so often went, in the ninth inning of the Cardinals' 2022 elimination loss to the Phillies.

Shakedown in Cincy

Aug. 10, 2010

Don't come tap-tap-tapping your bat on my shin guards.

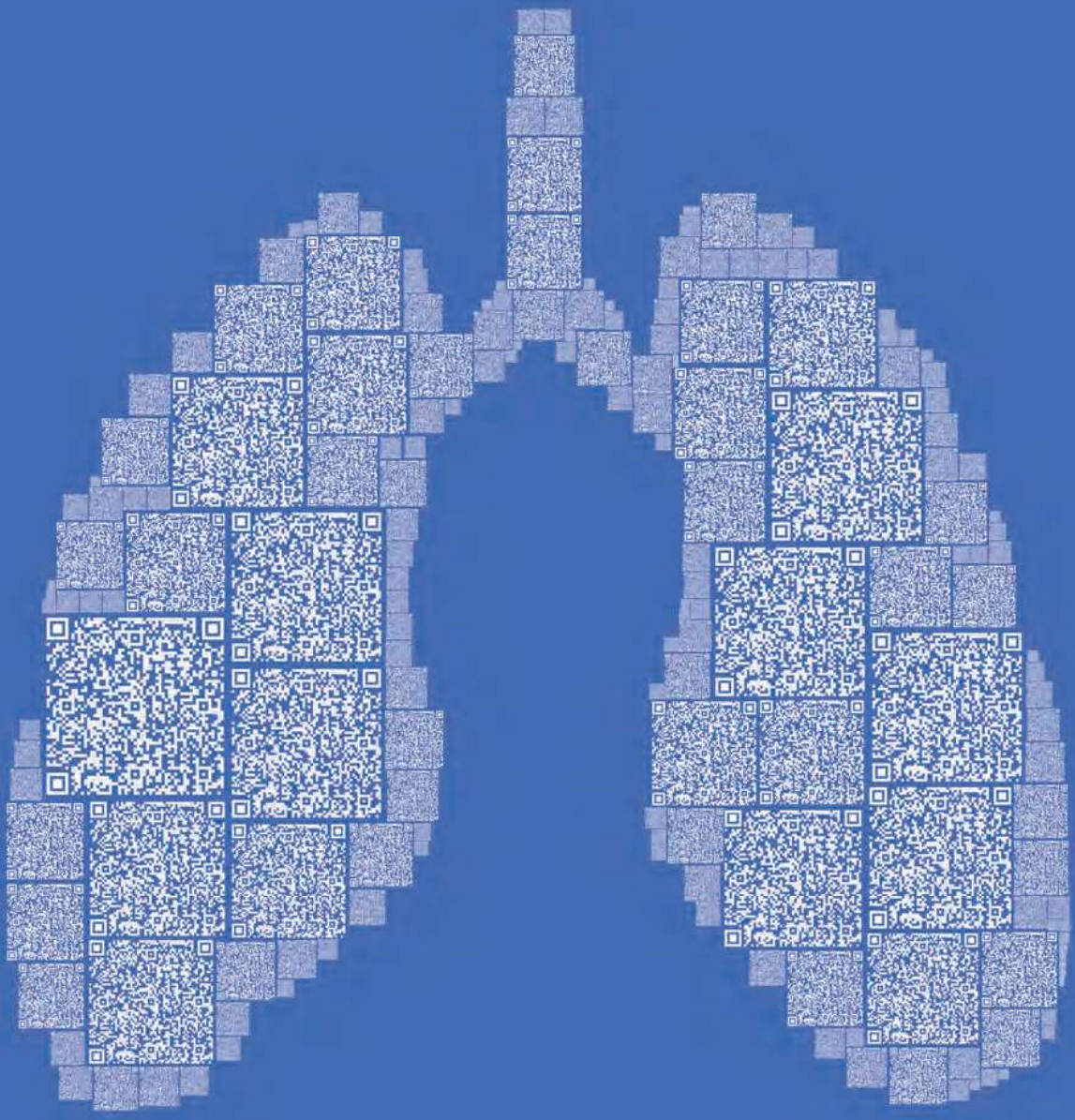
That was Molina's message for the Reds' Brandon Phillips, who'd colorfully criticized the Cardinals in the press. The leadoff man stood by his story before the series' second game and tried to stand in for his first at-bat at Great American Ball Park.

Phillips acted as if the two had dinner plans later. Molina didn't take kindly to the taps, and served something else. He ripped off his mask, got in Phillips' face, and seven minutes of bench-clearing mayhem ensued.

"The comments he made yesterday that he's got (no respect for us) over there . . . if you've got nothing, why are you touching me?" Molina said. "You're not my friend, so don't touch me."

During the melee, Reds starter Johnny Cueto repeatedly kicked Jason LaRue in the face, resulting in a concussion that led the Cards backup catcher to retire. Somehow, Cueto wasn't ejected, and Molina took him deep in the second inning of an 8-4 Cards victory that fueled a sweep the next day.

Fans in Cincinnati subsequently booed Yadi on return trips – his .301/.338/.470 slash there was his highest at any Central Division park – and even as an NL All-Star in 2015.



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THAT'S A BIG 10-4

Special Y2K
April 14, 2021

Maybe Molina proved true the time-worn cliché of "age is just a number" during a career when he was still playing at 40.

But when he tried to tell us 2,000 games caught was just another number, we didn't buy it. Nor did Wainwright, on the mound the day Yadi became the only catcher to achieve it for one team and just the sixth overall in MLB to reach that plateau.

"I know 2,000 was special for him. That just hard-seals a Hall of Fame career," said Wainwright. "You don't get to catch 2,000 games anywhere, especially with one team, if you're just not an unbelievable player."

Waino delivered the first pitch vs. the Nationals at Busch, the game was stopped, and players from both clubs and 13,206 fans (a total limited by pandemic protocols) applauded while a standing Molina saluted. Before Yadi could crouch again, Waino walked behind the mound, waved his arms and exhorted the crowd for more noise.

He also wanted to see Yadi "take a Cal Ripken lap around the field." Molina would've preferred a victory.

"If we would have won," he said after the 6-0 defeat, "it would have made it more special for me."

A silver batter
2013

Here's a question for your next Cardinals trivia night: What do Molina and Burl Ives have in common?

Silver and gold, of course.

Ives sings the most beloved version of the classic holiday song, and, in 2013, Molina wrapped up his first and only Silver Slugger to go along with his sixth consecutive Gold Glove (he'd win nine total).

Doubts about Molina's hitting had long dissipated. He'd batted better than .300 three times with a career average of .279 that tied him for fifth among all qualified catchers from 2004-12. But to think he'd ever win a batting title? In 2013, he almost did.

In fact, Yadi led the race for 64 days, the last on Aug. 30 at .330, and finished fourth at a career-high .319. His 44 doubles – a record for a Cardinals catcher – and 68 runs also represented career bests. He did lead all NL hitters in the clutch, batting .342 in the seventh inning and later.

Want more? Yadi also led all NL players in All-Star voting, batted .304 in the World Series against Boston and finished third in MVP voting, a personal high after placing fourth a year earlier.

Do-over done good
June 8, 2022

Molina made more visits to the mound over his career than any of us could count. But we'll always remember that he started and finished an inning from the bump twice during his final season.

Yes, Molina made his pitching debut and also recorded his first strikeout. Only not in the same game.

With the Cards losing 11-3 to the Rays at Tampa in June, Yadi got the bottom of the eighth and pitched a scoreless frame, including a strikeout of Isaac Paredes on three pitches: 49- and 51-mph curveballs looking and a 76-mph four-seamer swinging.

In fact, of the four relievers used by the Cardinals, only Molina didn't allow a run.

"It was fun, but we got beat," reminded Molina, who had the strikeout ball in his possession courtesy of catcher Andrew Knizner.

The outing was an improvement over his actual pitching debut, on May 22 at Pittsburgh with the Cards throwing an 18-0 shutout entering the bottom of the ninth. Alas, Yadi surrendered two homers and four runs – just as Albert Pujols had done a week earlier in his first, and only, turn at pitching in a 15-6 win over the Giants.

Career earned-run averages: Yadi, 18.00; Albert, 36.00.

Editor's Note: This story was published originally in Issue 5 of Cardinals Magazine in 2022.

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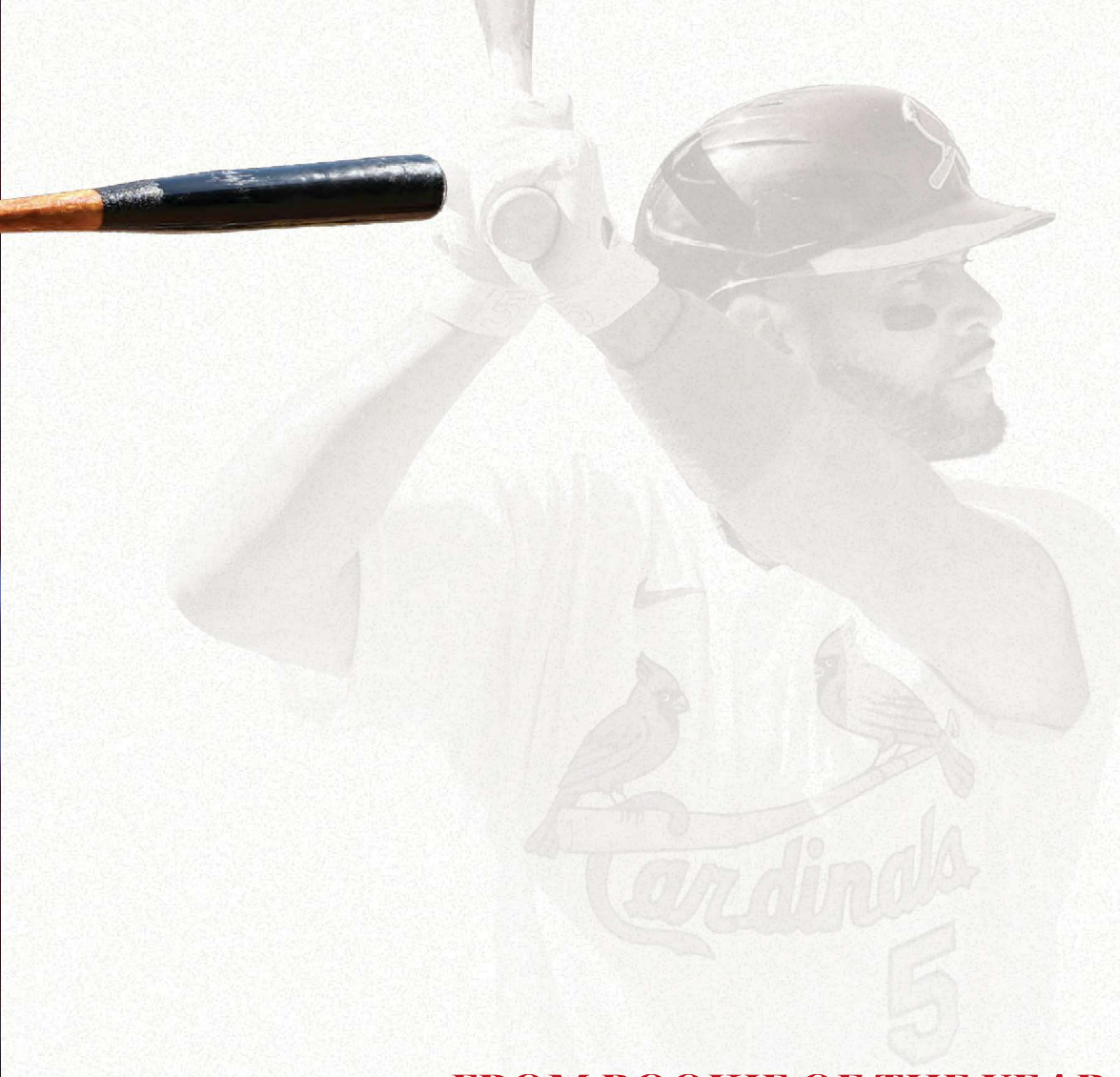
Twenty-one years after he homered in his first career at-bat at Busch Stadium II, Pujols went deep in his final regular-season at-bat at Busch III.



FROM ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

TO RAREFIED AIR WITH THE BABE AND HANK, ALBERT PUJOLS LEAVES A LEGACY AS ONE OF THE GAME'S ALL-TIME GREATEST HITTERS

Where to begin?

When Cooperstown is your final destination, one could fill an entire book with highlights of a Hall of Fame career (and, of course, most do).

The earliest chapter provided little evidence of what would ensue: "Albert Pujols" was a shortstop out of Fort Osage High School in the Kansas City area. Second-team All-Metro, at that. It was a position he'd play for just two innings during his 22-year major league career. But after being selected in the 13th round of the draft and spending just one season in the minors, the story was already taking shape. He reached the majors two months after turning 21 and would show his versatility with 30 or more starts at four positions his first year. Diehard fans may recall he even slipped in an inning at second base in that year's All-Star Game (his first of an eventual 11 selections).

By 2022, when Pujols put on a Cardinals jersey for the first time since 2011, nothing was surprising where Pujols was concerned – even at 42. He reinvigorated a fan base from Opening Day to the all-too-short postseason with highlights galore: his heartfelt participation in the Home Run Derby, his chase for 700 home runs, even his debut as a pitcher during a blowout Cardinals win.

Through it all, from his rookie season to the last hurrah, he piled up numbers that had little historical precedent, while also accumulating three National League MVP awards and winning two world championship rings.

He is fourth all-time in home runs, second in RBIs, second in total bases, third in extra-base hits, second in intentional walks and first in number of pitchers off whom he homered – 458.

But, most of all, Pujols led the Cardinals to seven postseason appearances in his first 11 years in St. Louis before helping guide the team to that promised land again this year. Naturally, he delivered hits in the final two at-bats he'd ever take.

Where to begin, indeed? More like, where to stop?

For his first 11 years, *Cardinals Magazine* devoted countless words and innumerable pages to chronicling Pujols' highlights as they happened. As we reflect on the magnitude of his career, here are 10 highlights … of many … from his time wearing the Birds on the Bat.

BEST OF THE BEST

Harbinger HR
April 9, 2001

It's always nice to make a good first impression.

In Pujols' case, his chance to wow the home crowd was a bit delayed. As he embarked on his rookie campaign, the Cardinals hit the road for a season-opening six-game trip; by the time they returned for their first homestand, Pujols already was batting .348. Slotted in the bottom-third of the order (the No. 7 spot) for the home opener against Colorado, Pujols finally came to the plate for his first Busch II at-bat with one out, one on and no score in the second.

After falling behind 1-2 on off-speed pitches, he showed Rockies lefty Denny Neagle what he'd make a habit of doing to pitchers who tried to slip a fastball past him.

He sent it over the left-field wall.

Pujols had connected for his first big-league blast three days earlier at Arizona, but the full house of 48,000-plus showed the rookie what it thought of homer No. 2: they gave him a curtain call.

"There are not many players who make it to the big leagues in their second year (in pro ball)," observed the eventual NL Rookie of the Year. "But ... it's much harder to stay. ... I will work very hard, because I want to stay."

Twenty-one years later, we can resoundingly say: Mission accomplished.

Making them blue
July 20, 2004

On the 35th anniversary of Apollo 11's landing on the moon, the 2004 Cardinals' rocket ride officially disappeared from radar screens in Chicago. Naturally, it was Pujols' first career three-homer game that powered the rockets.

Trying to stay within striking distance of the division-leading Cardinals, the second-place Cubs had roughed up starting pitcher Matt Morris for seven runs in the second inning, obliterating a 1-0 Cardinals lead that had come on Pujols' first-inning RBI double.

But in the final regular-season meeting between the division rivals, Pujols would take over mission control, delivering four hits and four RBIs in his next four at-bats to leave Wrigley Field bluer than any juke joint on the city's south side.

After a solo homer in the third, Pujols led off the sixth with a single to ignite a rally that would see four Cards eventually cross the plate. He went deep in the seventh to cut the deficit to two, and launched a two-run shot in the ninth to break a tie in the 11-8 comeback victory.

Providing a nice complement to his uniform number, Pujols finished 5-for-5 and drove in five. With the victory, the Cardinals took the season series, 11-8, and opened a 10-game lead over Chicago in the NL Central standings.

"I guess at this point we'd rather not play them anymore," reflected Cubs manager Dusty Baker.

A hush over Houston
Oct. 17, 2005

For a night, Pujols saved a season, stunned the Astros and their home crowd, and produced a blast many consider his greatest and most dramatic (which is saying something).

The silence was nearly deafening when it happened, though Astros starter Andy Pettitte, sitting in the dugout in shock and disbelief, managed to mouth an "Oh my ..." after watching the result of Pujols' ninth-inning swing in Game 5 of the NLCS.

The setup was equally dramatic: the Cards trailed 4-2 and had two on base but were down to their final out when Pujols, nothing-for-four, stepped to the plate.

Two pitches later, bam! The Machine drilled a homer off Houston relief ace and Cards nemesis Brad Lidge, sending the ball sailing to the train tracks high above the wall in left field ... a 450 (plus?)-foot journey. The three-run bomb held up, and the win extended the series, but two days later, Houston would clinch its first – and only – NL pennant by taking Game 6 in St. Louis.

"Everybody always tells me they remember where they were when they saw the Lidge homer," Pujols told *Cardinals Yearbook* in 2021, before adding, "but we lost that series."

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BEST OF THE BEST

Best buds

Sept. 3, 2006

One of the most beautiful relationships Pujols fostered in St. Louis was his support of the Down syndrome community (his oldest daughter, Isabella, has Down syndrome). On what was known as "Buddy Walk Day" at Busch Stadium, during which youths with Down syndrome got to go on the field before the game, Pujols was typically besieged by the youngsters to hit a home run.

So, generally, he did.

In this game, he hit three in his first three at-bats off the Pirates' Ian Snell, pushing him past 40 home runs for four consecutive seasons and bringing his stats on "Buddy Walk Day" to nine hits, five of them homers, with nine runs batted in for five games from 2002-06.

Hearing that the club's record was 4-1 on "Buddy Walk Day," Pujols told reporters afterward, "If that's the case, we need to bring those kids here more often."

Snell, who allowed homers in the first, third and fifth to Pujols, took the slugger's performance in good humor.

"I mean, that's unreal," Snell told reporters after the game. "That's like Superman playing baseball."

Pujols continued the tradition when he returned to St. Louis for his final season: on the last home game of the 2022 schedule — which was, indeed, "Buddy Walk Day" — he hit career homer No. 702.

A '3' for Busch III

April 16, 2006

Pujols busted out the moves in another three-homer game, this time at two-week old Busch Stadium III. What made this one stand out? The final homer was a walk-off wallop in the ninth, capping an 8-7, comeback victory over Cincinnati.

A quick rewind: Pujols' first homer scored two runs and tied the game in the fifth inning. His next, a solo shot in the seventh, extended the Cards' advantage to two, before the Reds rallied for three runs to go ahead in the eighth.

Pujols came to bat second in the ninth, after pitcher Jason Marquis delivered a pinch-hit single, and hammered the winning clout off reliever David Weathers to give the slugger five RBIs for the day.

Asked afterward about the pitch location, Reds manager Jerry Narron quipped: "Upper deck." And if, as the *Dayton Daily News* described, this game of ups, downs, backs and forths had a turning point, Narron simply answered, "Albert Pujols."

It marked the second of what would be five career three-homer games for Pujols (including one in the World Series), but the only one that produced a walk-off.

Also of note: He drove in five runs to contribute to 137 that year, tops in a career which featured 14 seasons of 100-plus RBIs.

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BEST OF THE BEST

Back-to-back for 700

Sept. 23, 2022

When Pujols entered the Cards' series opener in L.A. against the first-place Dodgers at 698 career homers, his second-half performance had left little doubt that he'd reach 700 before hanging up his cleats at season's end.

By the end of the fourth inning, there was no doubt.

After belting No. 699 against starter Andrew Heaney in the third – and putting the Cards ahead 2-0 – Pujols walked to the plate the next inning with two outs and two men on against Phil Bickford. On the third pitch, Pujols blasted his second bomb of the night and followed Babe Ruth, Hank Aaron, and Barry Bonds into the 700-homers club. The game paused, the stadium erupted, the slugger became emotional, and the Cards won the game, 11-0.

"I'm still (in) shock," Pujols shared at a postgame press conference, where he was surrounded by his children.

For the record, homers No. 499 and 500 also came during the same game – April 22, 2014, when Pujols' club at the time, the Los Angeles Angels, was on the road in Washington, D.C. As a third-year Cardinal, Pujols had reached the 100-homer milestone at Dodger Stadium.

A first at 42

May 15, 2022

In his final big-league season and back as a Cardinal, Pujols truly turned into a highlight Machine. But perhaps the most unexpected of all his spotlight-stealing send-offs arrived in the ninth inning of a blowout Cardinals win against the visiting Giants.

With St. Louis leading by 13, it made sense to save a bullpen arm by having a position player pitch.

Wait ... is that No. 5 toeing the rubber?

Turns out, the Hall of Fame hitter had lobbied manager Oliver Marmol to let him realize a career first in his 22 years in the majors: Pujols wanted to take the mound – the oldest to make his debut in National League history (and second to Lena Blackburne of the 1929 White Sox, who pitched one-third of an inning when he made his mound debut in his final major league game, at 42 years, 225 days old).

To the enjoyment of both dugouts (and a Sunday night national TV audience), Pujols "closed out" the victory by getting the final three outs – eventually. He pitched to seven batters, picking up the last two outs on groundballs. Of course, the score was 15-2 when he started pitching, and 15-6 when he finished (the Giants took him deep twice).

Although he absorbed a career ERA of 36.00 (ouch!), Pujols shared it was "a dream come true to say I (pitched in the majors)."

"It was fun," he said. "It wasn't fun giving up two bombs. I think the fans had a good time. I'm sure the guys that took me deep did, too."

PNC powder keg

Sept. 11, 2022

While there's no denying the comforts of home, there are destinations players can't wait to visit. And for Pujols, that place was Pittsburgh's PNC Park.

This September, Pujols made history there when he took over fourth place on baseball's all-time home run leader board. A few weeks later, he hit the final homer of his career, No. 703, and passed Babe Ruth for second all-time in RBIs.

His final career numbers at PNC Park as a Cardinal – 34 homers and 98 RBIs – were his most at any visiting park.

But the afternoon of Sept. 11 was undeniably extra special, as Pujols clubbed career shot No. 697 in the ninth inning to put the Cardinals ahead of Pittsburgh, 3-2. The night before – also at PNC – he had tied Alex Rodriguez for fourth place, but now he was all alone, trailing only Barry Bonds, Hank Aaron and Ruth.

Perhaps more impactful was the story of what happened to the ball. After the game, the couple who retrieved it met with Pujols. They explained the woman's father, who had passed away exactly a year earlier, had been a huge fan of the Cardinals, according to the *Belleville News-Democrat*. Touched by their story, Pujols insisted the couple keep the ball – and gave them two more, autographed, to boot!

"I think it means more to that girl than me having it in my trophy case," Pujols said later.

Career highlight, times two: hitting a historic home run, and being a nice person.

Fireworks

July 4, 2003

On this Independence Day, the Cubs received a friendly warning not to poke the bear.

Batting second, Cardinals outfielder Jim Edmonds hit a home run off Cubs starter Kerry Wood in the top of the first. When Pujols, the next batter, stepped to the plate, Wood threw two balls, one so off the mark that it caused Pujols to hit the deck.

He got up and immediately went back-to-back with Edmonds for the Cardinals' second homer. The radio call might've been just as memorable, as broadcaster Mike Shannon intoned, "Swing and hello, Fourth of July! Take a ride on that knockdown pitch, big boy!"

St. Louis managed to outlast Moises Alou's three-homer day and the 511th of Sammy Sosa's career for an 11-8 win that put them two games ahead of the Cubs (and one over the Astros) in the division.

However, it would be a rare year the Cardinals didn't make the playoffs with Pujols on their roster. The Cubs ultimately won the division, but lost to the Marlins in the League Championship Series.

Pujols did win the only batting title of his career that season, hitting .359 to go with 43 homers and 124 RBIs.

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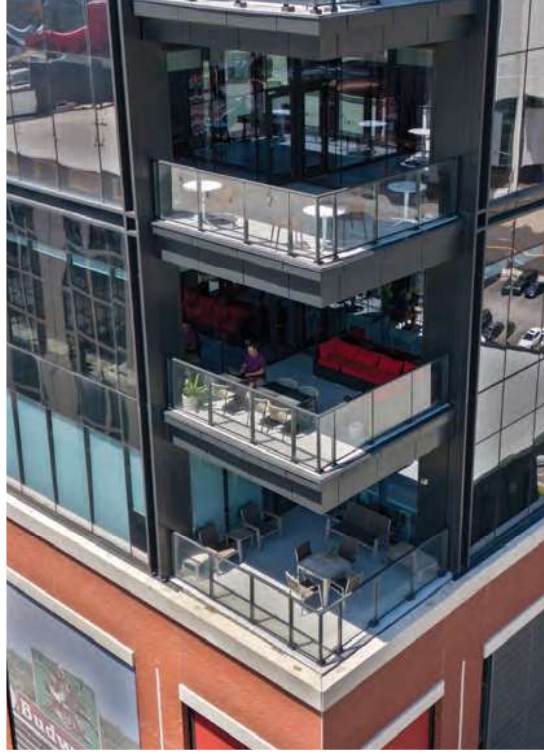

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Texas toast

Oct. 22, 2011

Hold onto your horses.

After the Rangers had tied the Fall Classic with a Game 2 win in St. Louis, Pujols restored the advantage to the Cards, and in a historically big way: He hit a World Series record-tying three homers in Game 3 at Arlington, Texas – all in successive at-bats over the final four innings – as the Cardinals stormed to a 16-7 triumph.

The three homers tied the single-game mark established by Babe Ruth (1926 and 1928 vs. St. Louis) and equaled by Reggie Jackson. But Pujols did the legends one better, doing it as part of a five-hit game. "(So) he's better than Babe Ruth and Reggie Jackson," reasoned loquacious Cardinals outfielder Lance Berkman.

One might be tempted to think it was to be expected, given Pujols' caliber, but consider this: he'd had just one homer in his two previous World Series.

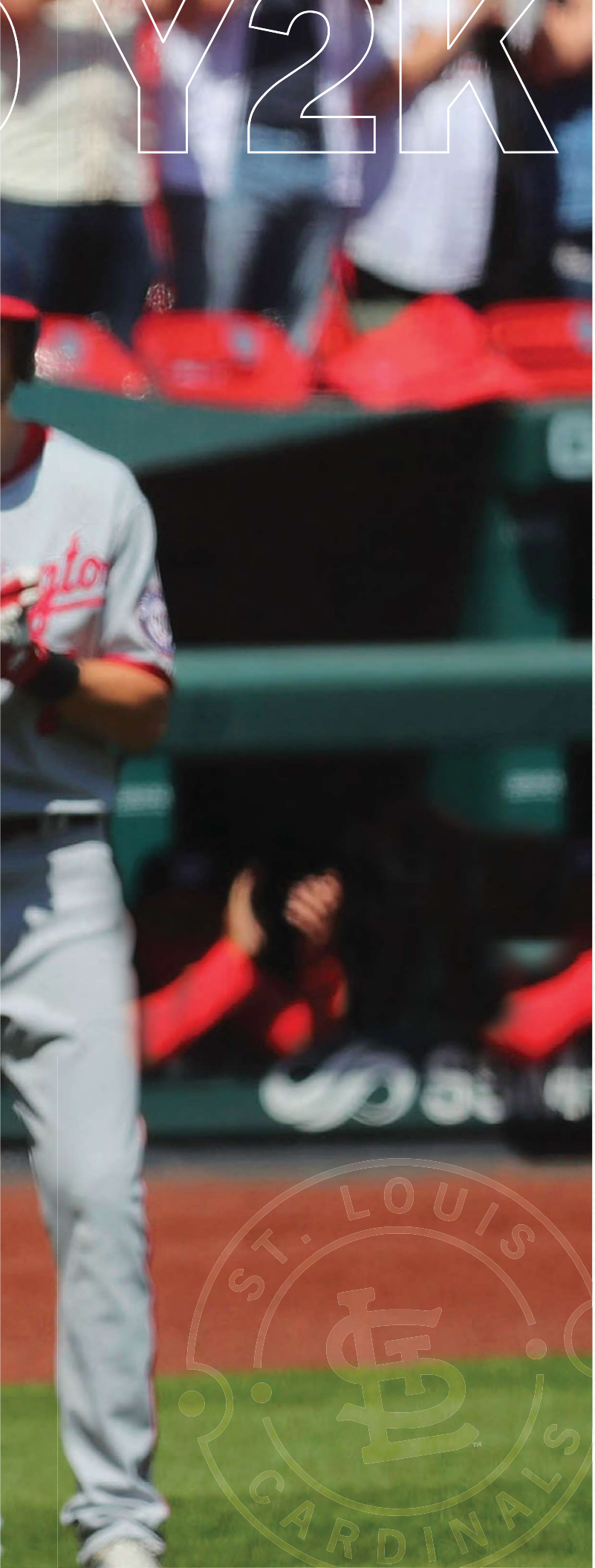
Pujols also tied World Series records with his five hits and six RBIs, set a mark with 14 total bases, and crossed the plate four times.

The first homer, a three-run shot in the sixth, provided separation for the Cardinals, who were clinging to an 8-6 lead.

"There were a couple times in the dugout during the middle of the game we said let's have a game like we'll never forget," noted La Russa. "That's kind of what he did."

Editor's Note: This story was published originally in Issue 5 of Cardinals Magazine in 2022.

TOAST TO



A TOAST TO Y2K

By Stan McNeal

Catching his 2,000th game ... throwing out runners from his knees ... blasting game-winning home runs – that's Yadier Molina in 2021. At 38, Yadi tells Cardinals Magazine he feels stronger than he did five years ago; pitchers tell us why No. 4 remains irreplaceable.

Do you remember Y2K?

No, not the catastrophic computer breakdown that was predicted for the start of the new millennium. We're talking about April 14, 2021, at Busch Stadium, where Yadier Molina became the first player in major league history to catch in his 2,000th game with the same team.

Now that's a real Y2K, and a number Cardinals fans won't soon forget.

"Any time you hear 'only one in MLB history' to do anything, that's pretty cool," marvels Adam Wainwright, who started that day's game against the Nationals.

After throwing his first pitch, and with play stopped to recognize Yadi's feat, Waino stepped away from the mound and helped lead the crowd in applause for the Cardinal who's spent 18 seasons in St. Louis, second only to Stan Musial.

Actually, Adam, it's way cool.

The occasion of Molina reaching another milestone seems almost as routine as seeing him in the lineup virtually every day, but it should never be taken for granted, even as the catcher was about to turn 39 in July. (Remember how we couldn't be in the stands to watch him get hit No. 2,000 in 2020?)

A TOAST TO Y2K

Consider a few of his achievements, along with Y2K, that fans (back in ballparks) have already seen this season:

- On Opening Day, he extended his own franchise record by starting at the same position for the 17th season in a row.
- On April 5, he collected his 382nd double and climbed past the man considered the greatest catcher ever, Johnny Bench, into eighth place for most two-baggers by a primary backstop.
- On April 17, Molina slugged two home runs and a double to tie his single-game high of 10 total bases. Because both homers were part of back-to-back bombs, he also became the first Cardinal in at least 60 years to contribute to back-to-back blasts twice in the same game.

It was quite a first month, but only a fraction of the story so far. The nine-time Gold Glove winner and All-Star is throwing out runners above his career rate of 40 percent, and has upped his offensive production from the past several seasons.

Want more proof? Consider what he did on back-to-back weekends in May: In San Diego, he threw out a runner from his knees that triggered texts and a tweet from a Hall of Famer; six nights later in St. Louis, he walloped a solo homer that broke a seventh-inning tie and provided the winning margin in a 2-1 win over the Cubs.

"I feel stronger than five years ago, 10 years ago," Molina shared recently during an exclusive sit-down with *Cardinals Magazine*.

Yadi's seven home runs in his first 30 games were his most at that point in any season. Entering June, his slugging percentage and OPS+ were tracking toward career bests. And with an average exit velocity around 90 mph, he was hitting the ball harder than in any season since at least 2015 (when Statcast metrics were made available).

Always more reticent to speak about his hitting than his defense, Molina doesn't elaborate much on his increased power. It was, he says, a "weird offseason."

"I didn't have much time to train, just (time) to play winter ball," offers Yadi, who participated in Puerto Rico's runner-up finish in the Caribbean World Series before signing with the Cardinals three days later and ending his first foray into the free-agent market. "I don't know. It's baseball. This year, the power is there. I'll take it."

Of course, even among the game's best, there's always something that could be upgraded (it's baseball, after all). So far this year, Molina is striking out at a career-high rate and has increased his launch angle by about 36 percent over last year.

He insists he hasn't sold out for the all-or-nothing approach that has overrun the game.

"I don't buy into anything," says the veteran. "I don't like to strike out. I need to work on that."

Molina's focus remains fixed on the priority that's been a constant throughout his career: winning ballgames. The day of his 2,000th game caught, Yadi did acknowledge the accomplishment was "special," but quickly pointed out the Cardinals had lost. That not-about-the-numbers sentiment comes as no surprise to his oldest brother, Cardinals Spanish radio analyst Bengie Molina.

SINCE ADAM WAINWRIGHT THREW HIS FIRST INNING (IN RELIEF) TO MOLINA IN SEPTEMBER 2005, THE WAINO-YADI CONNECTION HAS GONE HAND IN HAND WITH CARDINALS BASEBALL – 327 GAMES TOGETHER ENTERING JUNE 2021.

"If he gets a record, he gets it," reasons Bengie, who won a pair of Gold Gloves during his career. "Sure, he's happy, but I don't think it's on his mind. We talk all the time, and I really don't think he thinks about numbers."

In the end, Molina's body of work, including the contributions that can't be quantified, doesn't whisper "Hall of Fame" – it shouts it. Even Bench, the catching icon and Hall of Famer, asserts Molina has passed the test of time and is not merely "worthy" of election, but deserves first-ballot entry.

In stiff-arming Father Time, Molina has added to a list of plaque-worthy achievements that parallels that of Bench and the only other catcher who was a first-ballot Hall inductee, Ivan Rodriguez. Like "Pudge," Molina won a Gold Glove at 35 and will play at least through 39. Bench, slowed by various injuries, stopped catching full time when he was 32 and retired at 35.

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A TOAST TO Y2K

While Molina didn't spend as much time in the gym last offseason as he typically does, he didn't lose any strength. He posted an Instagram story of himself squatting 405 pounds this spring, which he says is as much as he's ever lifted.

There also are outside factors, perhaps, that are keeping his passion from waning. Coming to the ballpark is more fun than a year ago, Molina concedes, and not only because COVID has released its grip on the game. One can expect the acquisition of Nolan Arenado, coupled with the club's early return to the top of the Central standings, have been energizing. Certainly, Molina knows as well as anyone how long a season is, but he already likes this team's chances as much as any Cardinals club in his career.

"We've had some great teams, and this team is right on the top of the list," he says. "We've got talent. When you (are behind the plate and) look to your left side and you see Nolan, and on the right side you see (Paul) Goldschmidt, those guys can play this game. I'm happy to be on the same field with them."

The feeling is mutual among his teammates. In fact, just ask any pitcher who's worn a Cardinals uniform in recent memory. *Cardinals Magazine* has talked to dozens over the years and not once has anyone described Yadi's abilities as anything less than special.

No one has thrown to Molina more than Wainwright, who holds an edge over runner-up Chris Carpenter by nearly 800 regular-season innings. In fact, Waino's been the guy on the rubber for over 10 percent of Molina's time behind the plate – more than 1,800 of the nearly 17,000 regular-season innings Yadi has caught.

"It's his everyday greatness," Wainwright explains. "He does everything great behind the plate, he's so baseball-smart you can't even believe it, and his toughness is off the charts. A few years back, we were watching TV in the video room and there was a play when Yadier got hit right in the mask. A little later, he got it in the kneecap. I turned to Jedd Gyorko and said, 'What do you think this guy is going to feel like when he's 60 years old?' And Jedd goes, 'I don't know, but he's probably going to catch 135 games.' "

For now, we're celebrating 2,000, with help from a dozen of the 163 pitchers who had a hand in Yadi getting there. Their can't-miss insights on the catcher who's arguably the best in the biz follow.

Adam Wainwright

BATTERYMATES: 2005-2021

The longest-tenured teammates currently in the majors, Wainwright and Molina rank fourth all-time in starts by pitcher-catcher tandems. Along the way, they've authored a treasury of storybook moments.

Their association was tied for eternity when "Uncle Charlie" was just a rookie, working as a reliever, and Yadi was behind the plate to catch his series-clinching strikeouts in the 2006 World Series and NLCS. Waino has thrown all 10 of his career shutouts to Molina, who also caught the only complete game of the pitcher's postseason career. Fittingly, it clinched the 2013 NLDS, and afterward the two embraced in a long hug that Waino calls "pure love." He has finished runner-up in Cy Young voting twice during their time together, and both have received the Roberto Clemente Award for their humanitarian efforts.

I've been saying for years that when I'm sitting back in the rocking chair someday, I'll be proud to tell the grandkids that one of the crowning achievements of my career was throwing to one of the game's greatest catchers almost every time I pitched.

There are many reasons I say that. Physically, we all know he's a specimen, but I think he's even more incredible mentally. He really has no weaknesses as a catcher, and he'll still figure out a way to get two hits a night for you.

He's remained the same humble guy, too. After that game recently in San Diego when he threw out a guy (trying to steal second) from his knees, I checked my Twitter feed when we got on the plane to head home. I saw a tweet from Chipper Jones that was like, "Young pups still try to test the best catch and throw guy of all time. 'U gonna learn today!' "

I showed it to Yadi, and he was blown away. It was like his humility came out, like, wow, Chipper Jones thinks I'm good. So I texted Chipper and told him that Yadi's blushing right now, that he can't believe someone like Chipper Jones would say something that flattering about him. Chipper replied, Are you kidding me? He's the greatest catch-and-throw catcher of all time.

I think Yadier knows he's pretty good, but I'm not sure he knows how many Hall of Famers think the same as Chipper does. Multiple Cy Young winners have come up to me over the years and said, "Dude, if I could have just one year with Yadier Molina, it would mean the world to me. And I know I would do crazy great things."

He's not slowing down at all. In fact, he's better this year on both sides of the ball than I've seen in a few years. He's got more power than I've seen in awhile, for sure. He's throwing the ball great. Blocking the ball great. His body is moving great. We saw a few years ago he got real thin to prolong his career. Now he's in that "tweener" mode where he's not so thin but not that big. He's in a really good spot athletically right now.

You can't ever overlook his toughness, either. He gets hit somewhere every game. I saw him take a liner off a forearm recently, and I bet his arm was sore for a week. But he never talks about that stuff. I've never, ever heard him complain, and his body has to hurt. I think he has adapted to where now he believes hurting is normal.

When Yadier went to free agency last offseason, I thought for sure there'd be a bidding war because of all he brings. I hesitate to even say this because I don't want other teams to see it, but if they were basing their decision on some weird metric, they were making a mistake. If clubs really knew what a difference he makes to a team, they'd be lined up with their checkbooks like you wouldn't believe.

I've been around a long time, and I don't remember one pitcher ever having a problem throwing to Yadi, because Yadi adapts. He knows his pitchers and knows how to guide them through a game. Even the young guys that he initially doesn't know well, he can coach them through their first experiences.

He continues to do stuff every day that catches everyone off-guard because he's at least two steps ahead of everyone else.

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A TOAST TO Y2K

Carlos Martinez

BATTERYMATES: 2013-2021

Growing up in the Dominican Republic, Martinez knew of Molina but never dreamed he'd team up with the Cardinals catcher in the big leagues – until he had a chance to sign with the organization. Since Martinez's 2013 debut, he has pitched to Molina in more than 200 games, both as a starter and reliever. He has been an All-Star twice, pitched in the World Series, won 16 games as a starter in one season and saved 24 as a closer in another. Martinez praises his good fortune of having Yadi guide him through all nine seasons.

Knowing that Yadier Molina was with the Cardinals was one of the main reasons I signed with them. Then to make it to the big leagues and throw to Yadi was one of the biggest thrills I could experience.

I remember the first time I was called up to the big leagues (as a 21-year-old in early 2013 at Milwaukee). Everybody was saying congrats and welcoming me, and Yadi came up and gave me advice: "Stay within yourself. There's going to be a lot of people out there. Keep calm. You're going to do great." I pitched one inning that night, my first time throwing to Yadi (one hit, no runs or walks).

He helped me out again when I got my first save, also at Milwaukee later that season. We had just taken the lead in the 10th inning, and I got called in to finish the game. My first two pitches were balls, and Yadi comes out and tells me to keep the emotions under control and just do my thing, that this was my game. I was able to find my focus and pitch better (retiring the side in order).

Yadi has been there for me ever since. Whenever he comes out to the mound, he is never angry. He doesn't get on his pitchers. It's the opposite, really. When he comes for a visit, it's very positive. Like, hey this is your game, be intelligent, handle the pressure and enjoy. I feel very blessed to have such a close relationship throughout my time in the major leagues.

One thing I have learned is that it's best that I don't shake off Yadi. The first time I did was early in my career, and I gave up a home run. That wasn't the only time that happened, either. So no more. I would say it has been three or four years since I said no to Yadi's call. Still, he will assure you that it's your pitch, do what you want.

But I learned a long time ago that what Yadi wants is what I want, too.

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A TOAST TO Y2K

Lance Lynn

BATTERYMATES: 2011-2017

Since he last pitched to Molina, Lynn has played for four teams and thrown to 12 different catchers. None of them, Lynn says, has been better than Yadi. With Molina catching him for nearly half of his roughly 1,500 innings, the righthander posted a 3.37 ERA that is under his 3.51 career mark.

Lynn says he first heard of Yadi while following the game as a kid in Indiana, when he learned about three brothers who were all catchers in the major leagues. "You knew that Bengie and Jose were really good," he recalls, "but the story line was that they had a little brother who was better than everybody." Lynn was on hand to watch that narrative play out as advertised.

I remember throwing to Yadi for my first start in the big leagues. Obviously, there were a lot of emotions. When we met to go over the lineup, he asked a few questions about what I felt good throwing. I talked a little and he went, "All right, I got you." I'm like, OK. And he looks at me again and goes, "No, I got you. We're going to be all right. Just look at me and I'm right there with you."

As a young kid (24), it was definitely a comforting feeling that helped me relax. OK, Yadi's calling pitches and he's got me. Not that I would have shaken him off. You learn coming up in the minors that when you get to St. Louis, you throw what Yadi calls.

Whenever I'm asked why Yadi is so good, I give the same answer: He has an ability like I've never seen where, he could not call for a pitch – and have the pitcher throw whatever he wanted – but still frame it and make it look good. When I say that out loud, it's like, man, my stuff must not be very good if he could do that. But, no, he is that good back there. The game slows down that much for him.

Now, I'm not saying Yadi does that. I'm saying he has the ability to. We were together long enough that we had our moments, we knew what we were doing, and sometimes we could save the back-and-forth of putting down signs.

What I like best about Yadi is that he's there for everyone every day. He works his butt off to do everything he needs, but then he also knows what everybody else needs. He is the best teammate I've had because of the way he takes care of everyone. To catch as much as he does and yet be the guy who's there for his teammates is one of the special things about him. He's obviously a Hall of Famer on the field, and he's just as good a dude, if not better, off the field. It was an honor to play with him.

Jason Motte

BATTERYMATES: 2008-2014

Drafted as a catcher in 2003, Motte landed at Peoria and recorded 47 assists in 48 games; the next year, he was a Florida State League All-Star at the position. He worked alongside Molina during his first two big-league camps, before the Cardinals converted him to pitcher during the 2006 season. Motte reached the majors as a reliever in '08 and threw his first of 235 regular-season games to his former catching mentor. They also teamed as the battery for the final outs that clinched the 2011 NL pennant and World Series.

After Allen Craig caught the last out (of the 2011 World Series), I turned and looked at Yadi, and he had the biggest smile. It still gives me chills when I think about it. We locked eyes and he came to the mound and jumped in my arms. I'm like, OK, I think I can catch him. About that same time, I got hit from the side by teammates rushing to the mound, and before I knew it, I was on the bottom of the dogpile. I was on my side, and my thumb got caught under me. I yelled, "Yadi, I think I broke my thumb!" He goes, "It's OK, Papi, we've got three months to make it better!" (Motte did not suffer a break.) He's the best.

I was in big-league camp as a catcher in '05 and '06 with Yadi and Dave Ricketts. Ricketts was not only great at teaching you, but he was great at teaching you how to help others. Yadi was like that, too. We were both young (Motte is three weeks older than Molina), but he already had time in the big leagues, and I was in high-A. He was great at helping me and the other catchers try to do what he was doing. I remember days when we had early cage work at 6 a.m., and I'd arrive about 15 minutes early. Yadi had already been out there working. I was thinking, this guy already is really good, and he's still trying to get better. Wow.

After I'd started pitching, Yadi had a way of making me feel so confident. On a good day, I had a pitch and a half – a fastball and, sometimes, a cutter. But he could make me feel like I was the baddest man alive, even if everyone in the ballpark knew what I was throwing. Heck, even the way he put down signs would give you confidence. I could throw six consecutive fastballs, he'd call for a seventh, and I'd think, "Yeah, OK, let's go!"

It was truly an honor and a privilege to have caught with him, and then to have had him catch me.

Jaime Garcia

BATTERYMATES: 2008-2016

A lefthanded presence in the Cardinals' rotation for much of his 10-year major league career, Garcia ranks fourth among pitchers who have thrown the most innings to Molina (after Wainwright, Chris Carpenter and Martinez).

In seven seasons beginning with his 2010 rookie campaign, Garcia went 61-44 with a 3.53 ERA for the Cardinals, ranking Top 5 among National League lefthanders in wins, ERA (min. 500 IP), innings and shutouts, and sixth in strikeouts. He posted double-digit wins four times, including back-to-back 13-win campaigns in his first two years (the first Cardinal to accomplish that feat since 1953).

Even so, the talented Garcia was frequently held back by injuries and now shares that he was "broken, physically and emotionally" during most of his time in St. Louis. Being able to work with Molina, he says, might have saved his career.

A lot of guys say that if not for Yadi, they wouldn't be the pitcher they were. Well, I'm saying literally, if not for Yadi, I would not have been able to accomplish half of what I did. I believe that God used Yadi on my behalf. He needed to be on those teams when I was so broken. I worked so hard, but my perseverance and resiliency to come back from the injuries would not have been enough. I needed to have the best catcher in baseball guide me.

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Because I was injured my whole career, I feel blessed and fortunate to accomplish what I did. When I say injured, I mean injured, not merely pitching through pain. It's crazy because some of the best games I pitched were when I was the most broken. I give Yadi the credit.

I can remember so many games when I could hardly throw a strike warming up in the bullpen, but Yadi somehow would help me find a way. If I threw 100 pitches, one night 70 of them might be sliders, but so be it. Another night, it might be 80 changeups. Whatever it took, Yadi could figure it out.

It's his willingness to get the job done, which is why he's still playing the way he's playing. I don't think there's anybody who has a better baseball IQ, ability to read a situation, stay in the moment, read the hitter, and just get it done. I don't think anybody has ever played the game at that level.

I would so love to have the perspective on life and baseball that I have nowadays and be able to throw to Yadi. I feel great physically and emotionally, and having the best catcher ever behind the plate would be unbelievable. But I've also had three surgeries and, more important, I have entered a new part of my life and am in a great spot.

I want to serve people, whether that's by speaking, writing a book, doing mission work or building houses. Hopefully I will be able to help others half as much as Yadi helped me in my career.

Trevor Rosenthal

BATTERYMATES: 2012-2017

No Cardinal had converted more saves (48) in a season than Rosenthal, and no reliever had more appearances with Molina catching, either. Over six seasons in St. Louis, Rosenthal – a 21st-round draft pick – pitched to Molina in 258 games, producing a 2.83 ERA. That's half a run lower than his 3.36 career mark.

When Rosenthal signed a deal with the Oakland A's this season before undergoing surgery in April to resolve thoracic outlet syndrome, it marked his sixth organization since St. Louis. At each stop, one topic always comes up upon his arrival – the experience of working with Yadier Molina.

For me, Yadi commands a different level of respect. You want to do well for everyone, of course, but when it was Yadi out there, I knew I had to have my "A" game, because he did.

One of my special memories of pitching to Yadi came when I was a rookie in 2013 and we were playing at Milwaukee. The relievers in front of me had gotten into some trouble, and I didn't have much time to warm up before I went in. There were two outs, but the bases were loaded.

The Brewers' catcher, Martin Maldonado, came up. We worked ahead and got two strikes on him with fastballs. Then Yadi called for a changeup, but I kept shaking him off for a fastball. He actually came out to the mound and told me he thought the changeup was the way to go. I explained to him that, yes, probably, but because I hadn't had a lot of time to warm up, I just didn't feel comfortable with it. Yadi was like, OK, and went back to the plate.

And I thought, Yadi is starting to trust me. That was a cool moment for me. We executed the pitch and got out of the inning. When I was with San Diego and faced Yadi last year (in the postseason), it was like he hadn't missed a beat. I threw him some good pitches, and he ended up getting a hit off me. Yes, that was a little humbling, but it shows you how he can still do the job.

One reason he can is because of his strength. It's amazing. I saw a video of him (earlier this year on Instagram) squatting 405 pounds. A lot of people don't realize how rare a feat that is. I've never been able to squat 405, and probably never will. With the miles he has on his body, that shows you he's just different. I bet there's not another catcher in the game who can do that.

Now that I've been with other teams, I tell Yadi, "Dude, it doesn't matter where I go or who I talk to, the first question I am always asked is about you." Everybody wants to know what it's like to play with Yadi, what it's like to throw to Yadi. Then we get to talking about him, and I tell everyone the Cardinals would be making a huge mistake if they ever let him go.

Kyle Lohse

BATTERYMATES: 2008-2012

Of the six teams he pitched for in the majors, Lohse enjoyed his greatest success with the Cardinals. Injuries limited him in 2009 and 2010, but he won at least 14 games in each of his three other seasons and worked at least 188 innings. He was at his best in 2012, when he set the tone on Opening Day by taking a no-hitter into the seventh inning, and wound up 16-3 with a 2.86 ERA in 211 innings (all career bests). His .842 win percentage also led the majors.

Over the span of his 16-year career (2001-16), Lohse ranked fourth in starts and sixth in innings. The righthander pitched to 25 different catchers, teaming up most often with Molina. That he pitched his best with Yadi behind the dish was, Lohse says, not a coincidence.

Hands down, Yadi was the best catcher I threw to. He brings so much to the game, and much of it you don't understand unless you're pitching to him. Start with pitch-calling. There was one season I shook him three times all year – and I gave up hits on two of those three.

He's like an encyclopedia the way he retains information on opposing batters. (And he's just as good making adjustments during his own at-bats.) Watch him before the pitch when he's looking up and down the batter. He's not just checking to see if the guy is peeking in. He's looking to see where the guy's hands are, how far his feet are spread, how his weight is distributed, what his posture is.

From that, he can sense what kind of in-game adjustment the batter might be making. Every once in a while, he would put down a sign that would surprise me. One time we had talked about attacking a certain batter with outside fastballs because he had been pulling off the ball a lot. I threw a first-pitch fastball away, we got a bad swing and strike one. All right, I'm thinking, perfect game plan. But the next pitch, Yadi calls for a fastball in.

By this time, I had built so much trust in him that I thought, just execute the pitch and everything will be fine. Sure enough, I hit the spot and we got a weak popup. I wanted to know why he called a pitch outside of our game plan, so I asked him when we got to the dugout.

A TOAST TO Y2K

He said the hitter had moved his hands on the bat and stepped up in the box, and that led him to think the hitter was looking for a pitch away. In the heat of the moment, that's not something I'm looking for, but I checked the video – it was clear as day.

Something else that makes Yadi so special is how well he knows all his pitchers. I won't name names, but not every catcher is like that. I played on teams with catchers who didn't know what the "out pitch" was for some guys coming out of the bullpen. I know that because guys complained to me about it.

It's hard to fathom Yadi is still going at the pace he is. It's almost superhuman. I mean, I remember catching other pitchers' "flat-grounds" (throwing from the field vs. a mound). I would squat down for 20 pitches, and my knees would be hurting when I got up. I can't imagine doing that for 2,000 games, and who knows how many more.

Chris Carpenter

BATTERYMATES: 2004-2012

Only Wainwright has pitched more innings to Molina than Carpenter, a Cardinals Hall of Famer. The big righthander played in 159 regular-season games with Molina behind the plate, posting a 3.15 ERA – more than half a run lower than his career mark of 3.76. Molina also caught all 18 of Carpenter's postseason starts; the pitcher won 10 of them to set a club record and posted a 3.00 ERA.

I had heard about Yadi before he got here but didn't know a lot about him. Right away, I noticed his soft hands receiving the ball and how quiet he was – both verbally and catching. What really stood out was how young he looked. What a baby face!

But he was mature beyond his years. From the time he arrived, he knew what he was doing. He knew he belonged, and it didn't take me long to trust him. I watched him and saw how much he cared about preparation. You need to have confidence and trust in your catcher, and he was fantastic developing that.

Even as a youngster, he was able to guide me through a start because he understood how I wanted to work. That eliminated a potential hassle for me. If I shook off one sign, he would know what I wanted to do and adjust. There were minimal games when we weren't on the same page.

For instance, many times I liked to throw back-to-back breaking balls. If I threw the first breaking ball for a strike, he knew I wanted to come back with another. But even if I threw it for a ball, he'd know when I wanted to throw another to get a feel for it. That doesn't mean it was the right pitch, but he knew how I liked to work. That kind of understanding gave me confidence every time I was out there.

I won the Cy Young Award (2005) the same year Yadi took over as our starting catcher. Coincidence? I don't know, but obviously he had an enormous part in my success that season and my Cardinals career.

The most exciting thing I watched him do was back-pick guys off first base. He and Albert Pujols would catch everybody off guard. A pickoff at second base takes time to develop, so you'll see the play unfold. But a pick at first happens so quickly. I'd be watching from the bench, and all of a sudden the inning would be over – Yadi had caught someone napping! I loved watching that. I also loved when he'd follow a runner to first base, and try to sneak in behind him to catch the runner getting back to first.

He's one of the greatest catchers to ever play the game.

Seth Maness

BATTERYMATES: 2013-2016

A reliever with an uncanny knack for erasing baserunners by inducing ground-ball double plays, Maness ranks in the Top 10 for appearances with Yadi (167, ninth overall). When he showed up at his first big-league camp in 2013, Maness says he never felt nervous because he focused on executing the pitches the game's best catcher called for.

I learned right away that Yadi could get very creative in his game-calling. In my first appearance in my first spring training, I came in for Adam Wainwright. There were two outs and a couple of men on. Chris Carter was up, a big first baseman for the Astros, and Yadi called for a fastball inside.

I threw the pitch and Carter blasted it, and I wasn't sure when, or if, it would land. But it was right down the line, and I'm pleading, please go foul. And it did. I collect myself, toe the rubber again and look in for the sign. Yadi wants another inside fastball. I'm like, oh well, here we go.

Now, I didn't have the velocity of most guys in our bullpen, but I threw the pitch and it zipped over the inside part of the plate. Carter just stood there. It froze him, and I ended up striking him out. He clearly didn't expect this rookie to throw the same pitch he had just smashed. But Yadi surprised him. I finished the inning without allowing a run, and ended up with a story I will tell for a long time.

For me, Yadi has an innate ability, or a feel, to know which pitch is going to work best (for a pitcher) in any situation. I don't think that's something you're taught, either. I think Yadi was born with that ability. His baseball IQ is so high.

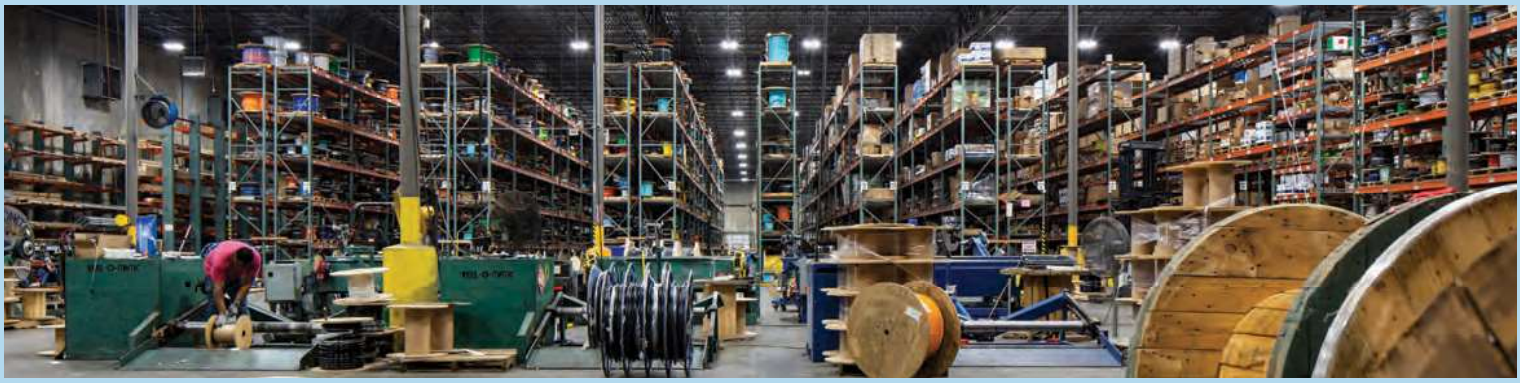
Michael Wacha

BATTERYMATES: 2013-2019

Few pitchers in franchise history have announced their arrival with more dominance than Wacha. A year after being drafted, the lanky Texan reached St. Louis in May 2013 and by the end of October had emerged as one of the game's biggest stories. The rookie outdueled Clayton Kershaw not once, but twice in the NLCS. He took a no-hitter into the eighth inning of a Division Series elimination game on the road. And that came after he'd pitched 8 2/3 no-hit innings in his final start of the regular season.

Molina was behind the plate for all of it, and continued to be a presence over the righthander's ensuing six years with the club. Wacha was grateful from the beginning – and paid close attention.

Near the end of my first spring training, I had been pitching well, but I think Yadi knew I would be starting the season in Memphis. But he came up to me and told me I was ready to pitch in the big leagues. "You can get big-league hitters out," he said. You talk about instilling confidence in someone! That was next-level right there. I was like, OK, if Yadier Molina is saying that, then, all right, I can do this.



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I remember watching him from the other side of the clubhouse that spring, wanting to see how he went about his business. I didn't approach him, but I paid attention to how he handled himself. And the way he did set the standard for me in my career.

The longest at-bat I've probably ever been part of was against Yasiel Puig with the bases loaded (in Game 2 of the 2013 NLCS). It was a big-time situation, and Yadi came out a couple times to make sure I was staying within myself and that we were on the same page with our plan of attack. I think (we) threw Puig off his game, and it worked out really well for us. (Puig chased a fastball low for strike three, and the Cardinals went on to win, 1-0.)

I never had to worry about bouncing a pitch with Yadi catching. That's a huge thing, too, especially with my changeup. When I get two strikes on a guy and want him to chase, there's potential for a wild pitch. Not with Yadi. He was like a brick wall, and saved me countless wild pitches.

He does so many things well that it's tough to single out what he does best. You could say his intelligence on the field is his biggest strength. But for me, it's his competitiveness. The intensity is there every day, and not just for his own benefit. He wants his teammates to have success, too.

Yadi wanted to be in the lineup every day and would get mad if he wasn't. I remember a few times when he was scheduled for an off day, but he'd arrive at the ballpark, say he was good to go and somehow get himself in the lineup. It's just who he is.

Jason Marquis

BATTERYMATES: 2004-2006

Of the 334 innings Molina caught his rookie season, Marquis was on the mound for more than 25 percent of them, the most of any pitcher on the 2004 staff. Marquis, one of four starters to notch at least 15 wins for those pennant-winning Cardinals, won his first seven decisions when teamed with Molina.

He also was paired with Molina in Game 4 of the '04 World Series, which gave him a direct view when Yadi got in the face of Red Sox slugger Manny Ramirez because he thought Boston was stealing signs. To Marquis, the incident showed everyone in baseball, on the biggest stage, that they'd better keep their eye on this up-and-coming backstop, then just 22 years old.

Even though I was only 60 feet away, I couldn't hear that much because of how loud it was. I know Yadi thought Manny had been relaying signs to David Ortiz when he had batted earlier, and I could hear some discussion taking place in Spanish.

NEARING HIS 39TH BIRTHDAY, MOLINA IS FIGHTING FOR ANOTHER TITLE, AND HE LIKES WHAT HE SEES FROM THE 2021 CARDINALS: "WE'VE HAD SOME GREAT TEAMS, AND THIS TEAM IS RIGHT ON TOP OF THE LIST," HE SAYS.

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A TOAST TO Y2K

I didn't expect to see Yadi do that, but he had seen something he didn't like and stood up for it. He was standing up for the team as much as for himself, and it was good to see. The game didn't turn out the way we wanted, but that did light a fire under us.

That was like a coming-out for Yadi. The entire baseball world saw what kind of intensity he played with. For the Cardinals, we already knew how good Yadi was, but that incident showed us that we could hand the reins to him and he would be able to take control.

I was with the Cubs the time Chicago pitcher Ted Lilly knocked him out of a game (in a collision at the plate in 2008 on what Molina called a "clean play"). So yes, I have seen Yadi's toughness up close. A lot of people might have stepped aside or backed away, but not Yadi. He's had that old-school mentality from the start.

He was fortunate to have two brothers who caught in the big leagues and to spend his first season backing up Mike Matheny. They were all great catchers and showed Yadi a lot – and he was smart enough to learn everything he could from them.

Jake Westbrook

BATTERYMATES: 2010-2013

When he was traded to the Cardinals in 2010, Westbrook already knew plenty about the two oldest Molina brothers, Bengie and Jose, thanks to his nearly 10 years in the American League. After hearing about their youngest brother during that time, he'd soon come to know him quite well.

During three-plus seasons in St. Louis, Westbrook made 75 starts with Molina as his catcher, and – no surprise – posted a 3.89 ERA that was nearly half a run lower than his career 4.32 mark. Westbrook had enjoyed similar success in Cleveland working with Victor Martinez (3.95 ERA). Nevertheless, after throwing more than 1,700 innings in his 13-year career, he doesn't hesitate when asked to identify the best catcher he pitched to.

Playing against Bengie and Jose in the American League, I could see how they went about their business and thought both were really good defensive catchers. Yet I kept hearing, you should see their younger brother, he's better than both. I thought, that's hard to believe. Because those two brothers were good.

My first time throwing to Yadi was my first start with the Cardinals. Most catchers in the big leagues are very, very talented, but I was struck right away with Yadi. He was so quiet with his hands and movements, and such a great receiver that he made it easy to throw to him.

It was impressive how he was able to handle all of his pitchers with the same skill, even though he was dealing with different kinds of stuff. I prided myself on having a good sinker; Adam Wainwright had the hammers; Lance Lynn had his own style. That didn't matter to Yadi. He made it all look pretty easy.

When he came out to the mound, he was very calm, but he could get stern when he needed to. He knew what I could do, and if he felt I wasn't pitching to my capabilities, there would be a little sternness in his voice. I had played much longer than him at that point, but it didn't bother me at all because of the respect I had for him. I never thought I had it all figured out, so to have a catcher like Yadi to rely on – the way he saw things on the field – was big for me.

To be honest, I am a little surprised he's still going like he is. I know how much work he puts into everything, but for anybody to have that kind of longevity, much less a catcher, is very impressive.

No question, he was the best catcher I threw to. I say he might be the best catcher of all time as far as defense goes – the knowledge of the teams he's facing, the way he goes about his business, how smart he is. A pitcher would be crazy to think he knew more about the hitters than Yadi does. Plus, he knows how to attack those guys with whatever pitcher he's working with. That's another thing that makes him so good.

Editor's Note: This story was published originally in Issue 2 of Cardinals Magazine in 2021.

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A TOAST TO Y2K - CHARTING PITCHERS

The 163 pitchers (and position players) who threw to Yadier Molina through his 2,000th game caught, listed by number of regular-season outings

Games		Innings
321	Adam Wainwright	1,831⅔
258	Trevor Rosenthal	258
235	Jason Motte	214
218	Ryan Franklin	227⅔
207	Kevin Siegrist	186
202	Carlos Martinez	777⅔
	Kyle McClellan	277
179	Mitchell Boggs	220⅔
174	Seth Maness	167
169	Jason Isringhausen	165
159	Chris Carpenter	1,079
144	Randy Flores	103
141	Fernando Salas	140
131	Lance Lynn	703⅓
	Randy Choate	68
129	Jaime Garcia	739⅔
126	Michael Wacha	680⅔
121	Trever Miller	65
120	Matt Bowman	110⅔
118	Brad Thompson	216⅓
114	Seung Hwan Oh	114
113	Tyler Lyons	187⅓
107	Kyle Lohse	641⅓
102	John Brebbia	104⅓
101	Dennys Reyes	55⅔
99	Braden Looper	319
97	Russ Springer	73⅓
86	Marc Rzepczynski	63⅓
84	Jonathan Broxton	73⅔
82	Tyler Johnson	51
80	Tyler Webb	63
76	Jordan Hicks	77⅓
75	Jake Westbrook	446
73	John Gant	137⅓
	Edward Mujica	71
71	Brett Cecil	61⅓
	Julian Tavarez	60⅓
62	Giovanny Gallegos	64⅓
61	Andrew Miller	46⅔
	Ray King	32
59	Jack Flaherty	321⅓
57	Joel Pineiro	355⅔
53	Sam Tuivailala	52⅓
	Ron Villone	35⅔
52	Dakota Hudson	175⅓
	Blake Hawksworth	92⅔
51	Jason Marquis	316⅓
	Josh Hancock	69
	Dominic Leone	44⅔
50	Shelby Miller	274
49	Joe Kelly	176
	Chris Perez	46⅔
	Pat Neshek	44⅓
48	Sam Freeman	39⅓
	Mike Mayers	49⅓
	Alberto Reyes	47⅓
45	Miles Mikolas	268⅓
	Todd Wellemeyer	212
44	Jeff Suppan	246⅓
43	Mike Leake	249⅔
	Bud Norris	38⅔
41	Zach Duke	29⅔
40	Luke Weaver	176⅓
39	Mark Mulder	228
36	Miguel Socolovich	41⅓
35	Eduardo Sanchez	32
	Victor Marte	29
34	Austin Gomber	79⅔
33	John Lackey	215⅔
	Matt Morris	205⅓
	Ryan Helsley	40⅓
31	Alex Reyes	68
	Anthony Reyes	129
28	Cal Eldred	36⅔
27	Carlos Villanueva	47⅓
26	Matt Belisle	26⅔
	Josh Kinney	26⅓
24	Genesis Cabrera	27⅔
22	Kip Wells	108
	Troy Percival	28
21	Octavio Dotel	19
	Kelvin Jimenez	26
18	Miguel Batista	18⅓
17	Daniel Ponce de Leon	52⅔
	Dean Kiekhefer	13⅓
16	Barret Browning	12⅔
	Luke Gregerson	12
	Chasen Shreve	11⅔
15	Mitch Harris	15⅔
	Steve Kline	13
	Greg Holland	11⅔
14	Jeff Weaver	77
	Brian Tallet	8⅔
	Arthur Rhodes	6⅓
13	Sidney Ponson	57⅔
	Ryan Sherriff	14
12	Jake Woodford	21
	Junior Fernandez	11⅓
	Steve Cishek	10⅔
11	Kiko Calero	15⅓
	Edwin Jackson	65
10	Jorge Sosa	19
	Brian Falkenborg	14
	Blaine Boyer	13
	Jordan Walden	8⅓
9	Tyson Ross	23⅓
	Nick Greenwood	13⅓
	Carmen Cali	7⅔
8	Marco Gonzales	31⅔
	Dan Haren	29⅓
	Mike MacDougal	8
	J.C. Romero	5⅓
7	Brad Penny	43⅔
	Kwang Hyun Kim	35⅓
	Michael Parisi	11⅔
	Keith Butler	9
	Andy Cavazos	6⅔
	Maikel Cleto	6
6	Woody Williams	35⅔
	John Smoltz	34
6	Tim Cooney	31⅓
	Mike Maroth	14⅓
	P.J. Walters	10
6	Seth Elledge	5
	John Axford	4⅔
5	Bryan Augenstein	5⅔
	Troy Cate	5⅔
	Eric Fornataro	5⅔
	Juan Nicasio	5⅔
	Gabe White	5⅓
	Jimmy Journell	4⅓
4	Johan Oviedo	19
	Adam Ottavino	16⅓
	Brandon Dickson	6⅔
	Nabil Crismatt	4
	Jason Simontacchi	4
	Brian Fuentes	3⅓
	Bill Pulsipher	3
3	John Gast	12⅓
	Mark Worrell	2⅔
	Raul Valdes	2
	Ricardo Rincon	1⅓
2	Chris Narveson	5
	Jerome Williams	3
	Kodi Whitley	2⅔
	Michael Blazek	2
	Dennis Dove	2
	Kevin Jarvis	1⅓
1	Randy Keisler	5
	Rick Ankiel	4
	Joe Mather	2
	Preston Guilmet	1
	Marcus Hatley	1
	Felipe Lopez	1
	Justin Masterson	1
	Aaron Miles	1
	Jorge Rondon	1
	Jess Todd	1
	Sandy Alcantara	⅔
	Rob Kaminsky	⅔
	Jedd Gyorko	⅓
	Josh Lucas	⅓
	Evan MacLane	0

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HALL YES: BENCH BACKS YADI FOR FIRST BALLOT

By Stan McNeal

If anyone should know what qualifies a catcher for Cooperstown, it's Johnny Bench, the dominant receiver of his era and generally regarded as the greatest of all time.

A middle-of-the-order masher who commanded the field with his skill behind the plate, Bench helped power the Big Red Machine over a 17-year career capped by induction into the Hall of Fame in 1989. Along the way, he hauled in awards and accolades that would fill an entire wing in most museums: two MVP awards, 10 Gold Gloves, Rookie of the Year honors, 14 All-Star nods, two World Series championships and a World Series MVP.

Now 73 and nearly 38 years removed from his final at-bat, Bench remains close to the game, paying special attention to the men who guard the plate.

On a recent morning, when Bench visited with *Cardinals Magazine*, it was clear that he'd been keeping up with St. Louis' own catching royalty, Yadier Molina, because he brought up a foul tip that whacked the Cardinals catcher on his bare hand the night before.

While no one in Cardinals Nation needs convincing the 38-year-old Molina is a worthy Hall candidate, the topic isn't without debate in other circles.

The analytically inclined point to Molina's career OPS+ that's below league-average, and a comparatively low WAR measured against HOF standards (though perhaps that says more about the stat's shortcomings than Molina's). Among traditionalists who say the numbers on the back of the baseball card are the truest indicators of player value and ability, they see a career average just above .280 and not even 175 home runs – and wonder what's Hall-worthy about that.

BENCH BUILT HIS LEGEND AS THE GAME'S GREATEST BACKSTOP WHEN HARD CONTACT WAS THE NORM. RENOWNED FOR PLAYING THROUGH INJURIES, HE ONCE ADMITTED "THERE WERE TIMES I WISHED I HADN'T CAUGHT. BUT THEN I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN JOHNNY BENCH."

To get true Hall of Fame perspective on Molina's qualifications, what better source than Bench, who has little incentive to be biased, and whose expertise on the topic is unparalleled?

Before we could even complete the question, Bench put an adamant stamp of approval on Molina's Hall of Fame chances – and even enhanced them.

"First ballot," Bench replied. "Oh yeah, he's first ballot."

To be elected to the Hall on any ballot is a tremendous honor, considering just 264 of the approximately 20,000 players who have appeared in the majors have been accorded the honor. But here was the greatest catcher of all time saying flat-out that Molina deserves a first-ballot distinction given only 57 players in a century and a half of professional baseball.

Consider this, too: Of that incredibly select group, even fewer played primarily at catcher. There's Bench, who was named on 96.4 percent of the ballots cast in 1989 (the 15th-highest percentage for any player at any position). There's Ivan "Pudge" Rodriguez, the all-time leader among catchers in Gold Gloves (13) and games caught (2,427).

And . . . that's it.

Of the more than 2,300 players who've ever caught a major league game, the only two first-ballot Hall of Famers are the only two with more Gold Gloves than Molina's nine.

"Yes, I know," says Bench. "Well, there's only about 19 catchers in the Hall of Fame total (including former Cardinal, Ted Simmons, who will be inducted this summer)."

For Bench, career longevity matters, and the excellence Molina has maintained after 18 years has elevated him to a special place among the elite. In a 2013 interview, Bench was asked by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch about Molina's Hall of Fame chances; his answer, while optimistic, was to check back in 10 years.

Turns out, it took less time to make Bench a believer.

"I thought the Cardinals were crazy (in 2017) when they signed him to a new contract (three-year extension)," Bench told *Cardinals Magazine*. "I'm thinking, here's a guy well into his 30s. There's no way that's going to work out. Then he just proved everybody wrong. His durability has exceeded every catcher's lifetime. Amazing career."

When Bench was Molina's age, 38, he had been retired for three years. Bench caught regularly for the last time in his age-32 season, before playing mostly third and first base in the final three of his 17 seasons – all with Cincinnati. (His 1,742 games behind the plate for the Reds rank second to Molina for most games caught for one team).

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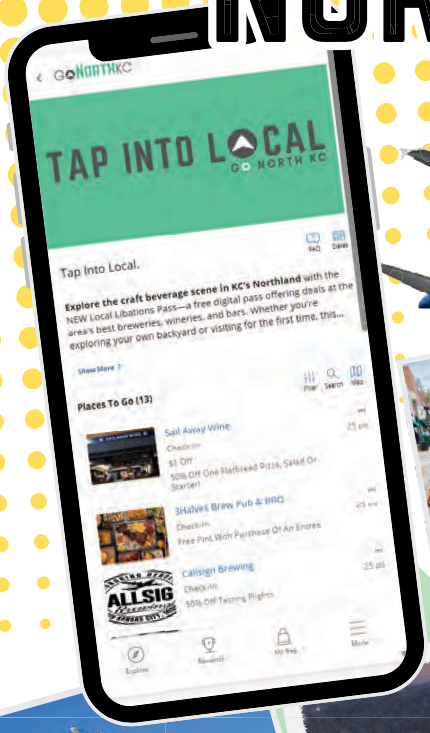
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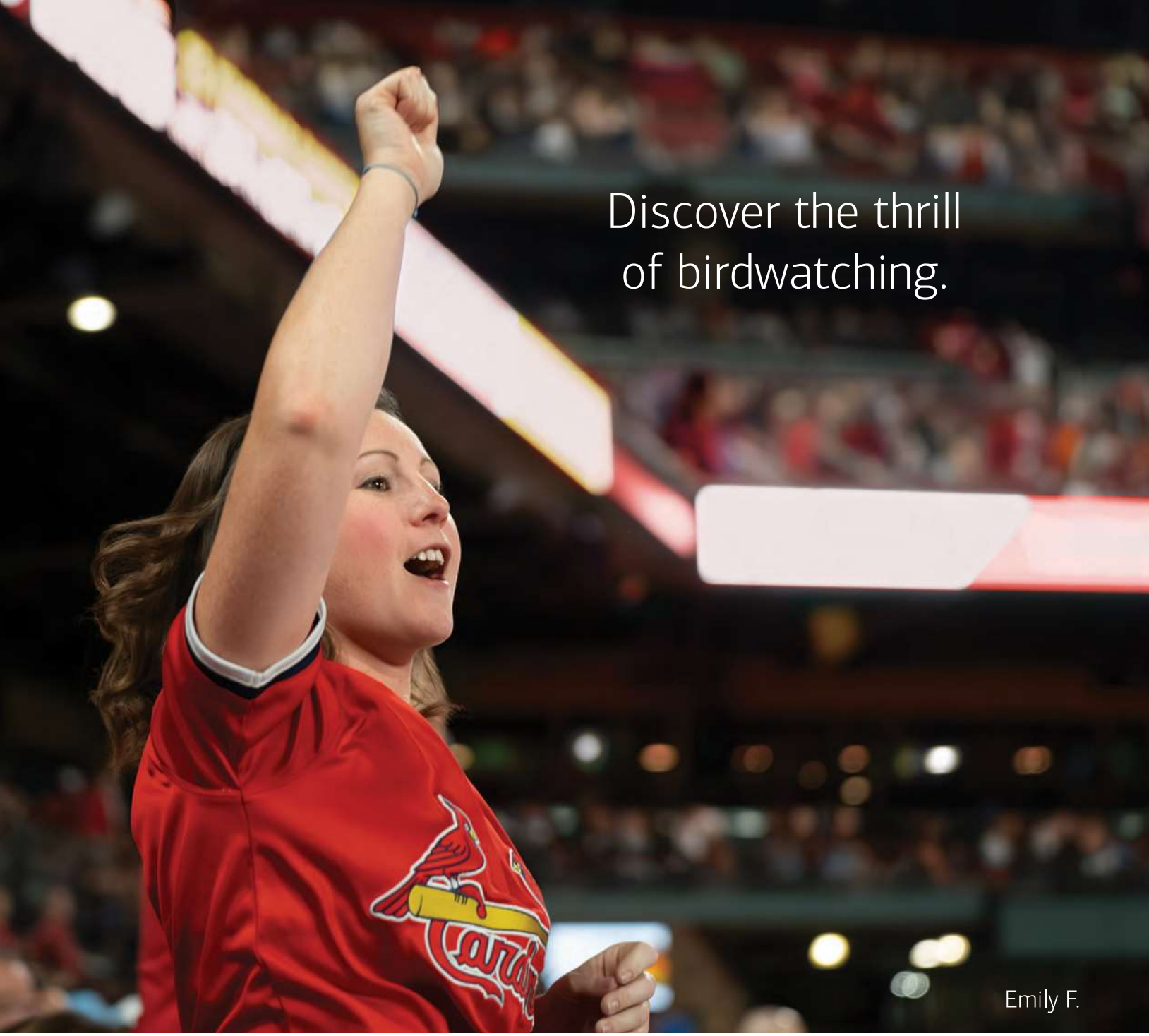

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Since Molina turned 32, he has caught more than anyone else in the majors, defying age and the toll of injuries he's battled through. Clips posted to his Instagram bear witness to his work away from the field to maintain his durability, whether it's a quick video hit of a workout or a screen shot of his Garmin showing off details of an early-morning run.

His lowest batting average in the past five seasons (all since age 33) has been .261; he started 2021 batting .323 (before a foot injury cost him 11 games) and has finished above .300 five times in his career. (He's also closing on Bench's 2,048 hits as a catcher, which rank seventh all-time.) Add to that his four Platinum Gloves since the award was created in 2011, and his nine All-Star selections.

Moreover, it's doubtful that any player, at any position, from any era, is more committed to his craft.

"He takes pride in what he's doing, that is clear," Bench says. "He takes his role so seriously, and you can see the trust he's earned from his pitching staff. Now, he's earned the respect and admiration of not just his team, but from myself and guys like me who have been there and done that. He is the glue that puts everything together."

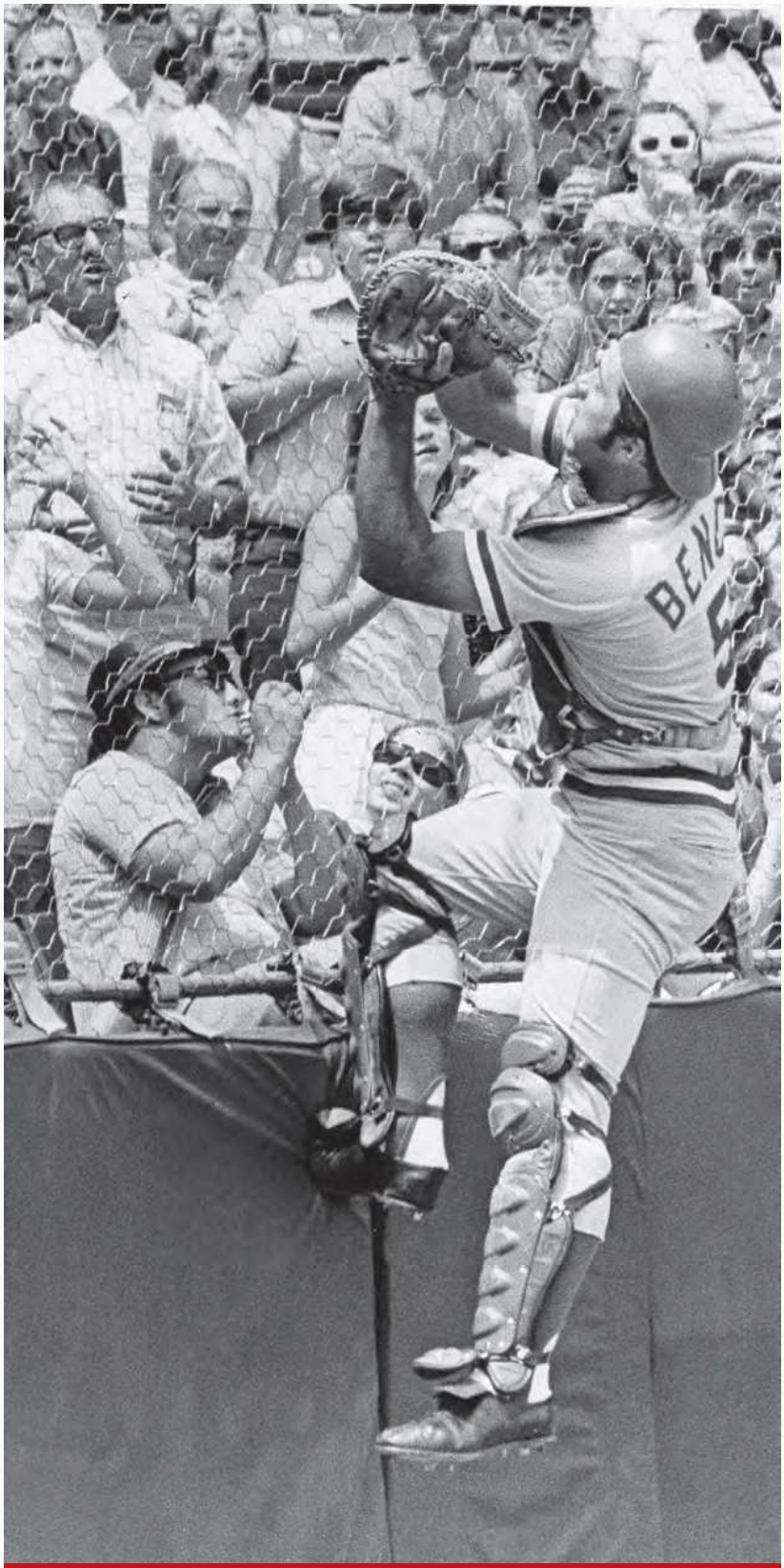
Bench notes that Molina also has enjoyed advantages that come with catching at the right time and for the right team. Advancements in training methods and injury treatments have surely augmented his hard work to remain in peak playing condition. More significantly for catchers, an MLB rule introduced in 2014 outlawing collisions at the plate has reduced the hazards of playing the position (a change, by the way, that Molina did not favor). Says Bench, "I've still got spike-mark imprints on my legs from getting hit in mid-air."

Catching for the Cardinals, a team typically deep in pitching, makes for a better situation, too. Molina has acknowledged that working with the Redbirds' young stable of arms helps keep him young.

"It's a great motivator to have a pitching staff that he can really work with," Bench says. "He manages the game, and he understands the hitters. The real success of a catcher is getting a guy without his best stuff through a game, and he's been doing that a long time. You know the pitchers appreciate what he does."

Bench says he has not had the chance to spend much time with Molina, but he knew about him even before he was drafted. When the Reds brought Molina to Riverfront Stadium to work out a few days before the 2000 draft, Bench was on hand. Several years later, in one of the few times they have spoken, Molina says Bench related that he had recommended the Reds select him, but they didn't listen.

The Reds' loss was the Cardinals' gain, of course. And someday, believes Bench, it will be the Hall of Fame's, too.



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SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

By Stan McNeal

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Albert Pujols still knows his way around Busch Stadium, the same as during the glory days when it seemed like he owned the place. And while he remains an intimidating figure to opposing pitchers, his presence is now marked by the influence and knowledge he's imparting to younger Cardinals eager to learn – and the undeniable fun he's having along the way.

Sometimes, Albert Pujols admits, it feels like he never left.

When he arrives at Busch Stadium on game day, the walk from the parking lot to the clubhouse is still so familiar that he can make it with his eyes closed.

As he navigates the walkways beneath the ballpark, longtime club employees greet him just as they did during his 11 seasons here at the start of his career.

"Same people treat me with the same respect," he says, "and I treat them with the same respect." How about those workers who weren't around from 2001-2011? With a trace of sheepishness on his face and in his tone, Pujols offers, "They know who I am, and they introduce themselves. It's fun."

Upon entering the clubhouse, he sees his iconic No. 5 (it hadn't been issued since he left) hanging in the same locker, which is next to the same neighbor. Yes, BFF Yadier Molina is stationed beside him, and BFF No. 2 Adam Wainwright is still right across the way.

And if Pujols feels like stepping outside the room, chances are he might bump into another old acquaintance, bench coach Skip Schumaker, a teammate along with Yadi and Waino, when the Cardinals won World Series championships in 2006 and 2011.

Most comforting of all, the 2022 version of Albert still knows how to find the seats beyond the left-field wall at Busch. He showed that in his second start, when he went deep on the first pitch of his first at-bat in a series opener against the Royals. It was his first homer in a Cardinals uniform at the park in a regular-season game in 3,855 days, and the sense of déjà vu was palpable when the crowd summoned Pujols for a curtain call, though this one seemed a little more emotional for the slugger and the 40,000 fans looking on.

"It's been a beautiful thing to be back," says Pujols, who confesses he's enjoying himself more these days and spreading that fun to the club. For example, could anyone have imagined the intensely focused first baseman stepping forward in his prime to eagerly volunteer to pitch the final inning with the Cardinals on the right side of a lopsided score?

No, we weren't dreaming when it happened, with a national audience tuned in as witnesses for ESPN's May 15 telecast from St. Louis. Pujols looked like the Little Leaguer who finally gets his wish to pitch when he secured the last three outs – and served up two homers – in a 15-6 win over the Giants, who enjoyed the moment just as much as anyone based on the smiles in their dugout.

"I thought it was just great theater," noted Giants manager Gabe Kapler.

Almost daily Pujols is showered with love and respect, from those who knew him when, and those just getting to know him now. From teammates and opponents, and from fans at home and on the road.

He still commands attention, even though his role as a designated hitter primarily facing lefthanded pitchers means fewer trips to the plate than in old times. But don't think Pujols is sweating that. "I want to help this ballclub to win as much as I can, whether it's on the field, off the field, mentally, whatever," he professes. "It's more than just playing the game now."

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SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Embracing his role of approachable mentor, Pujols is quick to share his knowledge (with Juan Yepez, right) and share in the fun that comes with winning.

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SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

EVERYONE'S WATCHING, AND LISTENING

Rookie Juan Yepez, called up in early May, was only 3 years old when Pujols hit 37 home runs during his 2001 rookie season. Now 24, the native of Venezuela was battling for a roster spot in spring training when the club signed Pujols to return and take over the righthanded DH/backup first-base job Yepez had hoped to claim before he was optioned to Triple-A Memphis.

End of story? Far from it.

Pujols wanted to make sure Yepez didn't lose confidence, so he left his number in Yepez's locker and also exchanged texts as the slugging prospect headed to Memphis. Yepez smacked nine homers over his first month and was welcomed by Pujols with a hug when he arrived in the visitors' clubhouse at Kansas City the morning after his promotion to the big leagues.

Yepez contributed a pair of doubles that afternoon in his major league debut. Following another two-hit game, at San Francisco, he became an interview target for the Cardinals' pregame show the next day and talked about Pujols' influence.

"I hope he's not getting annoyed with me, because yesterday I was asking (him) all of these questions," Yepez admitted. Noting that Pujols watches video of all his teammates' swings, Yepez requested an assessment of his own: "I was like, tell me what you see. Happy to have a guy like him, and I just look up to him."

Pujols has given a lift to "little brother" Yadi and everyone else around the organization. While he insists he's no less focused, he's also allowing himself to enjoy his final ride.

It's certainly not out of character for Pujols to share his experiences so others might benefit, but now he views it as part of his job. Like veterans who showed him the way – Placido Polanco, Edgar Renteria and many more – Albert genuinely cares about paying his knowledge forward. On days he's not in the lineup, he studies video not so much of himself but of teammates. He says it's about passing on "little things here and there," like others once did for him.

"I've seen it all, the ups and downs, the struggles in life whether on the field or off the field," Pujols says. "My goal with so many young players we have now is to share that and help them the best that I can. And the beautiful thing is they want the help."

Brendan Donovan is another rookie soaking in Albert's knowledge. Upon his first promotion to the majors in late April, he discovered his locker located next to Pujols' (on the side opposite Molina's). The 25-year-old newcomer called it a "wow" moment but says he quickly felt at ease tossing questions to Pujols.

"He's very approachable," says Donovan, "and when he tells you something, you're going to listen."

And when you see something he does that works, you're probably going to try it, too – even if you're not a rookie. After watching Pujols finish every swing with a high follow-through during batting practice, Nolan Arenado decided he'd give it a try. After all, the nine-season veteran has acknowledged Albert's been his favorite player, long before he became his teammate.

"I don't know why he's doing that (follow-through), but I'm going to start just because it looks great," the four-time Silver Slugger explained during an interview with MLB Network. "Every ball he's hitting has backspin, so I'm going to start doing it. And honestly, I feel it. It (finishing high) helps. So I'm doing it now just (because of) watching him."

After Harrison Bader hit his first homer of the season, a jubilant Pujols was waiting at the top of the dugout steps to deliver congratulations. The reception didn't surprise Bader, but it provided him with a memory for a lifetime.

"To have him welcome me like that means the world," Bader says. "He makes me feel like I've been playing with him for 10 years. Treats me like a grown man, talks to me like a grown man, and high-fives me like one. He doesn't big-league anyone. He's the man."

Look to the top of the organization's ranks and you'll find John Mozeliak watching in admiration of Pujols' influence on his teammates. The club's president of baseball operations admits he still feels a sense of awe when he considers what Pujols, as "one of the greatest players on the planet," meant to the franchise during the 11 seasons he produced other-worldly numbers.

"But I also have that awe of how he's interacting with our current team," says Mozeliak. "His ability to mentor young players is impressive, but it's more than young players. He's making sure that he's putting his fingerprints on everyone, and it's very genuine."

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SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

The presence is as threatening as ever when "The Machine" occupies the batter's box, with Pujols holding his own in the DH role he was signed to perform.

FUN ISN'T A FOUR-LETTER WORD

While so many things seem the same with Pujols, there's an undeniable change longtime observers quickly noticed. The steely focus he wore as his calling card — the countenance that was perfectly suited to his nickname of "The Machine" — surfaces far less these days; it has to share time with an ear-to-ear grin he isn't shy about showing off.

Before, during and after games.

When cameras catch Pujols in the dugout, it's not unusual to find him studying an iPad of his at-bat, or maybe a teammate's. But it's also just as common — perhaps even more likely — to see him animated and enjoying a moment, especially if Molina's nearby.

Having fun is something Pujols admits didn't come as easily his first go-around with the Cardinals. He was a young player so passionately committed to his craft that he probably carried added pressure to help his equally driven manager, Tony La Russa, bring St. Louis a title it hadn't seen since 1982. The change in his demeanor doesn't mean he's less invested in winning or distracted from his own preparation and performance, only that he's learned to enjoy the process.

"If there is something I could go back and do again, that would be it. I wish I could have had this same joy. No, not joy because I've always had the joy. But enjoy the way I go about it, the way I am now," he tells *Cardinals Magazine*. "I think it was (because of) the respect I have for the game. The game is hard, and that's who I was. Always grinding, working. I wasn't going to change. But now I do get to sit back and enjoy a little bit more. And I am."

And it's not hard to notice he's not the only one relishing the retro ride. From veteran teammates to rookies, from fans in the park to those watching at home, being around the 2022 squad just looks fun. Could it be the Cardinals are in danger of losing a long-held perception by outsiders as the "stuffy suits" of baseball?

As recently as last season, former Cubs pitcher Jon Lester admitted to *Cardinals Magazine* after his trade to the team that the Cardinals' laid-back nature and fun atmosphere in the clubhouse caught him off guard. "Being on the other side for so many years, I didn't know that," he said. "(From the outside), you think everybody's stiff and not having fun and all that."

Wainwright counters that the Redbirds have long existed as a fun-loving group and that any close-vested characterization is off-base. But he acknowledges Pujols' return has made people beyond St. Louis notice they're not immune to good times.

Concedes Waino: "He's legitimized it."

Pujols, however, is quick to remind *Cardinals Magazine* of this: Don't think for a second that he's gone soft and is here only to savor some sort of self-focused victory lap for a career that will soon carry him into Cooperstown.

The fun, he declares, "doesn't take away from what I do preparation-wise. There's nobody in that cage and there's nobody in that weight room who is outworking me."

Question the work ethic of The Machine? Forget about it.

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SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

NO. 5 WANTS NO. 3

It didn't matter to the club that Pujols long ago lost his standing as the game's most feared hitter, and that he hasn't played regularly since 2019. Six weeks into this season, he had started only two games at first base and ranked 11th on the team in plate appearances (collecting most of his at-bats as a designated hitter).

Manager Oliver Marmol has even lifted Pujols for a pinch-hitter in favor of a lefthanded bat to face a righthanded reliever, a move that might rankle some superstars. But Pujols understands. From the day he arrived at camp this spring, he knew his complementary role. He recognizes he doesn't have to be in the batter's box to help his team win.

"I could have gone someplace else and gotten more at-bats," Pujols says. "Other teams were really interested, but I held on a little while (before making a decision) to see if the Cardinals needed me. This is where God wanted me. I'm excited I didn't rush and now will finish where everything started for me."

His two early homers (within his first four games) reminded fans of the vintage Pujols years, but it was a couple of base-running plays in Miami that illustrated how the big man's baseball smarts are sharp as ever. He blooped a ball into short right field that dropped, and kept churning around first base to leg out a double, where he subsequently scored on a double. The next inning he singled, and then galloped all the way from first to score on Tommy Edman's triple. What did "little brother" Molina think of his hustle from first? "He's going to sleep like a baby tonight."

Anyone who isolated on Albert's .239 batting average through mid-May was missing the point of why he's here. He had performed as hoped against lefthanded pitchers, slashing .474/.524/.895 (1.419 OPS) with nine hits (four for extra bases), five RBIs, and six runs in 19 at-bats. As Marmol points out, Pujols' mere presence in the lineup makes the offense more dangerous. When he occupies the on-deck circle, opposing pitchers see two decades of damage looming.

"He's 'The Machine' for a reason," said Andrew Knizner, who also homered the same game Pujols cracked his first home run (680 of his career). "It's impressive to watch. Not only in the game, but in the cage and just listening to him talk to the team about approach and how to handle the game."

The same night, a reporter asked Pujols how he stays prepared when playing so infrequently, and the competitive drive that has never wavered came out – firmly.

"I've been doing it for 22 years," retorted Albert, who now lifts his front leg at the plate to get his lower body going. "I know what I need to do to get ready for the games and to be in this role."

Also know that Pujols is locked in on being part of a championship – the end goal of his farewell season. Sure, a torrid stretch could propel him to 700 home runs, like only Barry Bonds, Hank Aaron and Babe Ruth before him. But Albert isn't thinking about that, or discussing it. Though proud of his standing as one of the greatest hitters of all time, his personal numbers seldom are addressed. He's in St. Louis because he believes the Cardinals can challenge for a title.

His attitude, he maintains, is still the same at 42 as when he was a 21-year-old rookie, even if he might be enjoying himself a little more. "I come in and work my tail off, and my goal is to win a championship," he says. "I was blessed to do that twice with this organization. Hopefully, we can have one more last ride."

A dogpile on the final evening of the postseason featuring a trio of familiar 40-something Cardinals? Yadi and Waino certainly know how to celebrate on the mound. And if Pujols needed help retracing his steps since 2011, he got a head start when he toed the rubber in May.

Fun like that would make the good times these first two months, while undeniably enjoyable, seem like child's play.

Editor's Note: This story was published originally in Issue 2 of Cardinals Magazine in 2022.

Maybe Pujols delivered the magic touch to Ryan Helsley, judging by the reliever's early-season success. But whether through massage or message, it's clear Albert's impact is far-reaching.

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SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

JUST PITCHING IN

By Stan McNeal

On a night when the pitcher who started the game and his catcher set baseball's all-time record for team wins by a starting battery, the "pitcher" who finished it wound up stealing the show.

In game No. 2,988 of his 22-year career, Albert Pujols pitched for the first time – and loved it.

"It was a dream come true," he told reporters gathered at his locker afterward.

What it wasn't? Scripted.

Maybe some suspected it was because of the bright lights and big stage – Sunday night baseball on national TV and the social media surge that was sure to follow. You know, why not let the 42-year-old legend who's a lock for Cooperstown take the mound to save a bullpen arm and put a crazy capper on a game Adam Wainwright and Yadier Molina would make MLB history?

But, with the Cardinals cruising 15-2 over the Giants after eight innings on May 15, sending Pujols to the mound for the ninth was not a publicity stunt by manager Oliver Marmol.

The choice, Marmol revealed, initially came down to "Dickerson and Dickerson," as in Corey, who had entered in the seventh inning to play left field and seemed a reasonable candidate for the mop-up role. But Pujols, ever the attentive dugout observer, caught wind of the conversation between Marmol and Dickerson, and pitched his own services.

The manager didn't hesitate. "I said, 'What's wrong with that?'" he related.

So Pujols grabbed the glove of reliever Drew VerHagen (he had pitched the eighth), climbed the hill, and recorded three outs – with some interruption by the San Francisco offense – to join Babe Ruth as the only other player to hit more than 600 career home runs and pitch in a game. Ruth, of course, was an accomplished hurler (two 20-win seasons) before turning slugger. Pujols will go down in pitching history as the first to enter Cooperstown with a 36.00 ERA.

Tagged for back-to-back homers, Pujols was his own best critic afterward, all in good humor. "I'm pretty sure Babe Ruth didn't give up four runs in his first inning like I did," he volunteered. "I threw it right in the sweet spot. They made me pay – like I made a lot of pitchers pay over the last 22 years."

The spectacle helped cut through the gloom the Giants were feeling from being down 13 runs, with manager Gabe Kapler enjoying the inning as much as anyone.

"We all had a lot of fun with it," Kapler said in his postgame remarks. "You get to create a memory for people, and I'm sure Albert is never going to forget that. Our hitters are never going to forget it. They got to face Albert Pujols on the mound."

Pujols was his old self in the batter's box that evening, with two hits, two walks, an RBI and two runs scored in the 15-6 victory.

Once Pujols threw the last of his 27 pitches and the Cardinals retreated to the clubhouse, their focus was back on Molina and Wainwright, who worked the first six innings together. They were wheeled in laundry carts into the showers and drenched with libations like Fanta, Cherry Coke and almond milk (the cocktail of ... champions?). The victory was the Cardinals' 203rd with the duo as the starting battery, dating to 2007, and elevated them past former Braves Warren Spahn and Del Crandall (1949-63).

"We always say that records are meant to be broken, but I don't know about that one," stated Pujols. "I'm so happy to be a part of it and see them accomplish it. It's pretty awesome."

Molina's postgame critique of Pujols' mound debut was tongue-in-cheek blunt: "He needs to keep the ball down." But Pujols explained there was a method to the manner he worked to catcher Andrew Knizner. "I had to throw it up," he said. "Every time I tried to keep it down, I was bouncing it."

Just one week later, Pujols got his chance to give it back to Yadi. Yes, Molina also took a turn on the mound (wearing Waino's glove), his first in 2,173 major league games, in the ninth inning at Pittsburgh with the Cards up, 18-0. Like Pujols, he surrendered a pair of homers and four runs for an identical 36.00 ERA.

"At least I got an out (two) before (the Giants) hit a homer off me," joked Pujols, who went deep twice against the Pirates. "You, first (batter), and pow!" Yadi replied he couldn't get his grip because of the rain – "(Or) I would have thrown my split-finger."

Hey, who's splitting hairs over feel-good moments like these?

Certainly not Pujols or Cardinals fans who witnessed his pitching debut at Busch.

"It was fun," he concluded. "It wasn't fun giving up two bombs, but I think the fans had a good time. I'm sure the guys that took me deep did, too."

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CELEBRATION DAY

By Stan McNeal

A PACKED HOUSE HONORED ALBERT PUJOLS AND YADIER MOLINA FOR THEIR COOPERSTOWN-WORTHY CAREERS AND COUNTLESS CONTRIBUTIONS AS CARDINALS

Yadier Molina was at home plate, just like he usually is. Only this time he wasn't crouched behind it. Instead, No. 4 stood at a lectern and basked in a moment nearly two decades in the making as chants of "Yadi! Yadi! Yadi!" swelled to a crescendo in a ballpark packed to the rafters with his closest admirers.

The day had come for Molina to strap on his catching gear for the final time in a regular-season game in St. Louis. But for now, he and Albert Pujols found themselves the focus of a ballpark retirement ceremony, a distinction reserved only for the crème de la crème of Cardinals greats.

As the cheers subsided, it was time for Molina to do something he'd typically rather avoid: speak to a crowd – and in his second language. But when it mattered most, just like always, he came through. The career Cardinal (19 seasons total) expressed himself from the heart.

And it tugged at the heartstrings of Cardinals Nation.

The nine-time Gold Glove winner worked his way through the baseball names on his prepared notes, thanking those who had played a part in his success. And then Molina got to his mom, seated on the field just behind him in the family's section of eight seats. Much as the great Bob Gibson had praised his own mother when she attended his celebration day nearly half a century earlier, Molina would do the same.

Because his mother, Gladys Matta, speaks very little English, Molina told fans he would address her in Spanish. But as he began, his voice wavered, and he paused to regroup.

"Gracias por todos los sacrificios que tú y mi papá hicieron junto con mi tío (thank you for all the sacrifices you and my dad made along with my uncle)," he began, trying not to choke up. His two older brothers, retired major league catchers Bengie and Jose, were sitting one row behind their mother, and as Bengie wiped away tears, it was obvious all three Molina brothers were struggling to check their emotions.

They had a stadium full of company.

Dry eyes were as uncommon as runners who've dared challenge Yadi as Cardinals Nation gathered on a picturesque Sunday afternoon to fete two franchise giants before the Oct. 2 home finale against Pittsburgh. Hours before gates opened, eager fans started packing sidewalks and streets outside Busch Stadium, and by the time the festivities started, hardly an empty seat could be found in the sellout crowd of 46,680.

So special was this occasion that Adam Wainwright, the day's starting pitcher and longtime teammate of the duo, adapted his usually ironclad pregame routine to be part of the ceremony. Tabbed to speak on behalf of Cardinals players, Wainwright praised Molina as "the best defensive catcher" and "absolutely the smartest player that anyone's ever seen play this game."

CELEBRATION DAY

"I'm going to try not to cry – I don't think I'm going to do a very good job of it," Wainwright confessed at the microphone before directing his remarks to his longtime batterymate. "I'm going to miss you the most (pause). I'm not going to miss having wet shoes and wet pants from you pouring water bottles down my back when you're not playing, but I am going to miss playing catch with you every fifth day."

When he spoke of Pujols, Wainwright staked his claim that the Cardinals would have won at least two more World Series if No. 5 had remained in St. Louis rather than leave for a decade-long stay on the West Coast. But the journey had, thankfully, included a magic-filled 2022 reunion, allowing Pujols to wrap up his 22-year big-league run where it started.

"People ask me all the time, 'Who's the best player you ever played with?'" Wainwright remarked. "I say, 'What are you talking about? I played with Albert Pujols! Albert Pujols is the greatest hitter anyone on this team has ever seen and probably anybody playing the game today has ever seen, and there's no close second."

Waino was preaching to the choir, of course, but just in case anyone needed to see further evidence, it was coming.

SUITE EMOTION

When emotions rule the day, especially among family members, sometimes it's the person you'd least expect who doesn't get overcome with sentiment.

Shortly after the game began, *Cardinals Magazine* visited with members of the Molina and Pujols families and their friends in the neighboring party suites reserved for the occasion. Yadi's 14-year-old son, Yanu, served as translator when we met Gladys and asked if she, too, became emotional when Yadi honored her during his speech.

"No, she said she doesn't cry," Yanu, who had sat next to his grandmother on the field, shared matter-of-factly. "She said she was surprised that Yadi did because he's like her and doesn't cry, either."

Gladys, as Yanu related, said she knew this day eventually would come for Yadi, and she was pleased for him. What, we wondered, made her proudest about her youngest son's career?

"She says she's not 'proud,'" explained Yanu. "She says she's happy that God gave her the gift of my dad and her other sons."

While a festive vibe filled the suites from the beginning, another magic moment from Pujols took it up a notch. Stepping to the plate in the third inning for what ended up being his last regular-season at-bat at Busch, No. 5 repeated the outcome of his very first plate appearance in St. Louis two-plus decades earlier: He smacked a home run.

This one, which traveled onto the lawn above the center-field wall, tied the score and came off Pirates rookie and fellow Dominican Roansy Contreras, who was 17 months old when Pujols pounded his first big-league homer.

The only people not cheering like mad in the Pujols' suite as home run No. 702 shot through the air were those recording the at-bat with their phones. Pujols' oldest son, Albert Jr. (nicknamed "AJ"), could have been speaking for both suites – and perhaps the entire stadium – when he gushed, "That's the icing on the cake right there, cherry on top, whatever you want to call it. That just had to happen."

"Unbelievable" – but not necessarily surprising, remarked Todd Perry, the longtime executive director of Albert's charity, the Pujols Family Foundation.

You see, the home run also coincided with Down syndrome awareness day at the ballpark, and Pujols has a long track record for delivering home runs in bunches on such occasions. (Albert's oldest child, Isabella, has Down syndrome, and he started his foundation in 2005 in large part to support that community.)

In fact, Perry recalled a foundation staff member being so impressed by the slugger's production following his participation in an event for Down syndrome that he tallied up the stats.

"He was hitting like .780 on days when there was an event (at the stadium) or when he had been to one the previous day," Perry told *Cardinals Magazine*. "We're not talking a small sample size, either. This was after dozens of games. Being around the kids has always inspired him."

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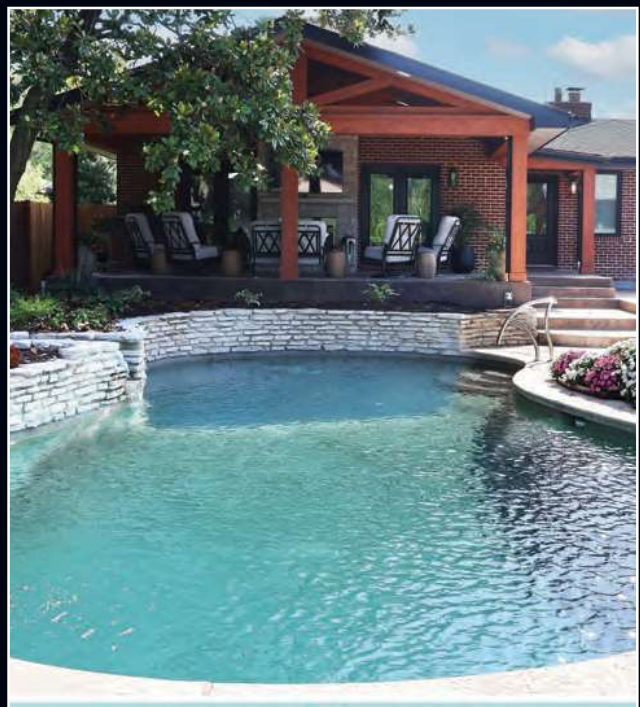

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The fact Pujols' own five children attended the final regular-season weekend at Busch surely inspired him as well. Early this year, word surfaced that Pujols and his wife, Deidre, were filing for divorce, and the children spent much of the 2022 season on the West Coast. When it came time for Pujols to speak to the crowd, his voice cracked as he turned to the "five beautiful people that I have behind me."

"Thank you so much for getting the best out of me, and pushing me to the limit," he told them. "I love you all."

AJ was just 10 when the family moved west, making him too young to remember many details of his dad's earliest exploits wearing the Birds on the Bat. Now a senior at Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, Calif., AJ is in his fourth year on the golf team and considering a career on the links. Though he's been entrenched for a while in Southern California, he wasn't about to miss his dad's final games at Busch.

"Everything is coming around full circle," AJ shared with *Cardinals Magazine*. "Being able to finish his career where he started, it's been an amazing journey to watch over the last couple of weeks, months. It's been an emotional weekend, lots of laughter, lots of tears, lots of happiness. To be behind closed doors and see what he's been going through has been really special."

It got a little more special when Molina and Pujols suddenly appeared in the suites, in uniform, after coming out of the game in the top of the fifth inning.

Speaking earlier at the ceremony and without prepared notes, Pujols also expressed his gratitude to numerous others instrumental in his return, beginning with "my good Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for opening this door to come back to the city of St. Louis and find the joy and the love that I have for this game."

CELEBRATION DAY

HEART AND HOME

After his final days as an Angel grew awkward and mostly unproductive, Pujols found his passion rekindled when he joined the Dodgers shortly into the 2021 season. They picked up Pujols days after his shocking release by the Angels in the 10th and final year of his $240 million deal.

He told the crowd at Busch that when MLB announced early in 2022 (February) that it was implementing a universal designated hitter, he could see a path to becoming a Cardinal once more. "I was like, wow, I might have a chance to go back to St. Louis and play again," he said. Ultimately, Cardinals president of baseball operations John Mozeliak, who also spoke during the ceremony, gravitated to such a reunion.

As productive as Pujols' return played out, it didn't come without challenges. When the 42-year-old got off to a slow start – Pujols hit .215 in the first half, with just six homers – he admitted he questioned his decision to play in 2022.

"I was like, man, I should have retired," he informed the crowd. "But I had a great faith in the Lord. There's no way that he brought me here to the city of St. Louis to embarrass myself. Just like Paul (the Apostle), he wants me to finish strong."

Of course, Pujols did just that. After the All-Star break, he led the National League in homers (18). To add another special note to the home finale, manager Oliver Marmol turned back the clock on the lineup. Explaining it "feels really right," Marmol started Pujols where he had been a fixture through his first stay in St. Louis: the 3-hole in the batting order and first base on defense.

Not surprisingly, Pujols delivered. In his first at-bat, he lined a ground-rule double down the left-field line to bring in the game's first two runs. Two batters later, Pujols came home on a sacrifice fly by Molina, the catcher's first of the season. It also was No. 75 of Yadi's career, the most by a Cardinal since 1954 (the year they became an official baseball statistic); it snapped a tie with Pujols.

The Machine already had produced plenty of damage in the series. The Friday night opener marked his first game back at Busch since reaching the 700-homer milestone the previous weekend in L.A., and he promptly smacked No. 701 to help the Cardinals win, 2-1. The next day, he delivered a two-run single in his first at-bat that started his team toward a 13-3 victory.

About the only downer during the entire farewell weekend was a 7-5 loss in the finale, in which Wainwright gave up six runs in 4 2/3 innings. But it turned out the pitcher's early exit provided another scene never to be repeated but always to be remembered.

Ideally, Marmol would have waited until the top of the sixth before pulling all three franchise icons to give the Busch faithful one more chance to show their appreciation. But with the Pirates leading 6-5 after Waino surrendered two runs (and the lead) in the top of the fifth, the manager intervened and sent all three legends walking off together to a standing ovation.

"Not everything is perfect," Molina said later of the timing. "The moment was great just to walk with Albert and Waino next to me. It was a great moment for baseball."

Added Wainwright, who admitted he didn't know about Marmol's plan, "I was proud to walk off the field with those guys, even though I was pouting a little bit. It still was a good moment for me to say I was teammates with two of the greatest ever. That was a cool time for Albert and Yadi and our whole team to see how St. Louis celebrates some of the greatest players – not just Cardinals – ever."

Indeed, the pair deserved and received a send-off worthy of the legacies they built. Club chairman Bill DeWitt Jr. could have been speaking for Cardinals fans everywhere when, during the ceremony, he conveyed his admiration of the retiring legends.

Of Yadi, he said: "Thank you for being a constant spark, the toughest player on the field and the heart of this team."

To Albert: "Thank you for coming home. And thank you for coming through."

Editor's Note: This story was published originally in Issue 5 of Cardinals Magazine in 2022.

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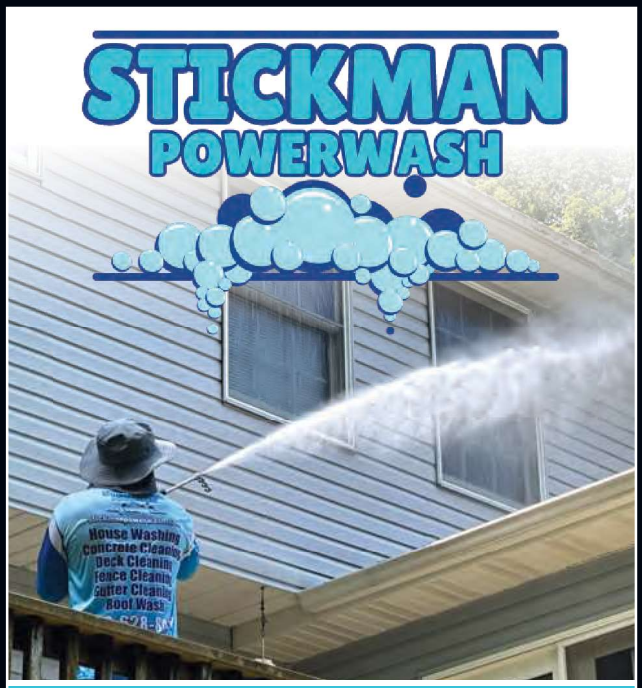

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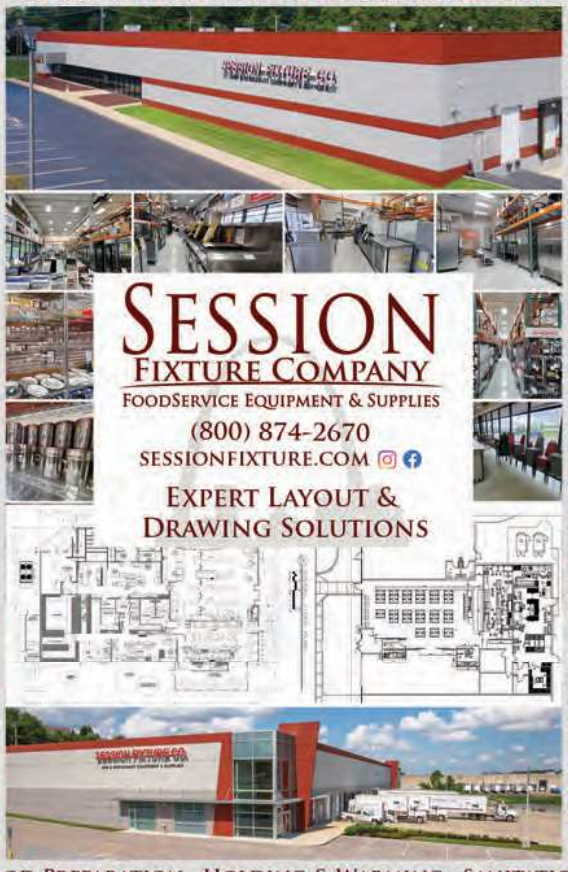

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GAME 1: OCTOBER 21

St. Louis Cardinals	7	W Anthony Reyes (1-0)
Detroit Tigers	2	L Justin Verlander (1-1)

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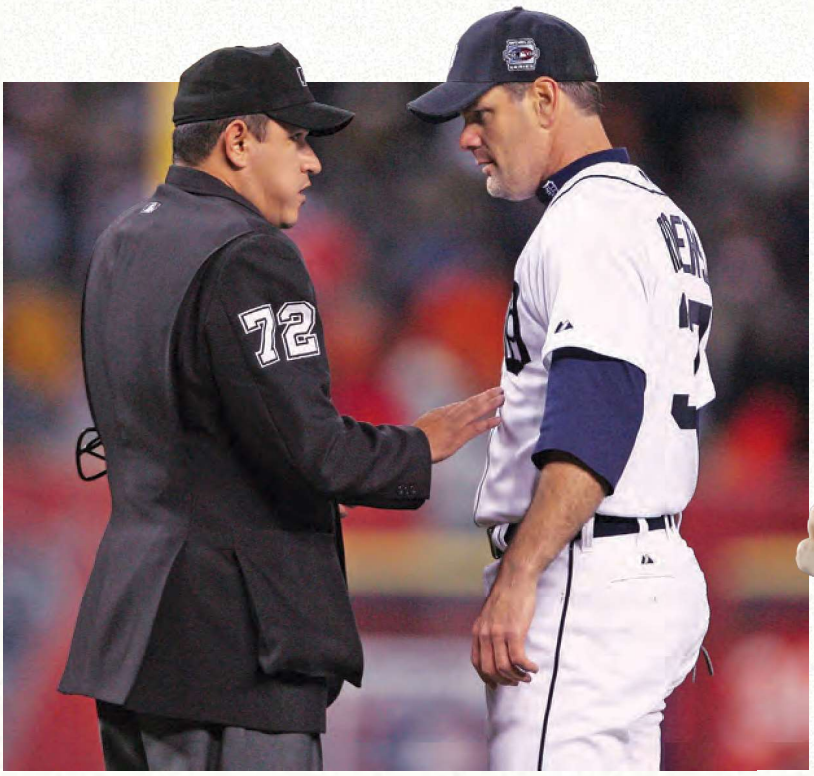
GAME 1: OCTOBER 21

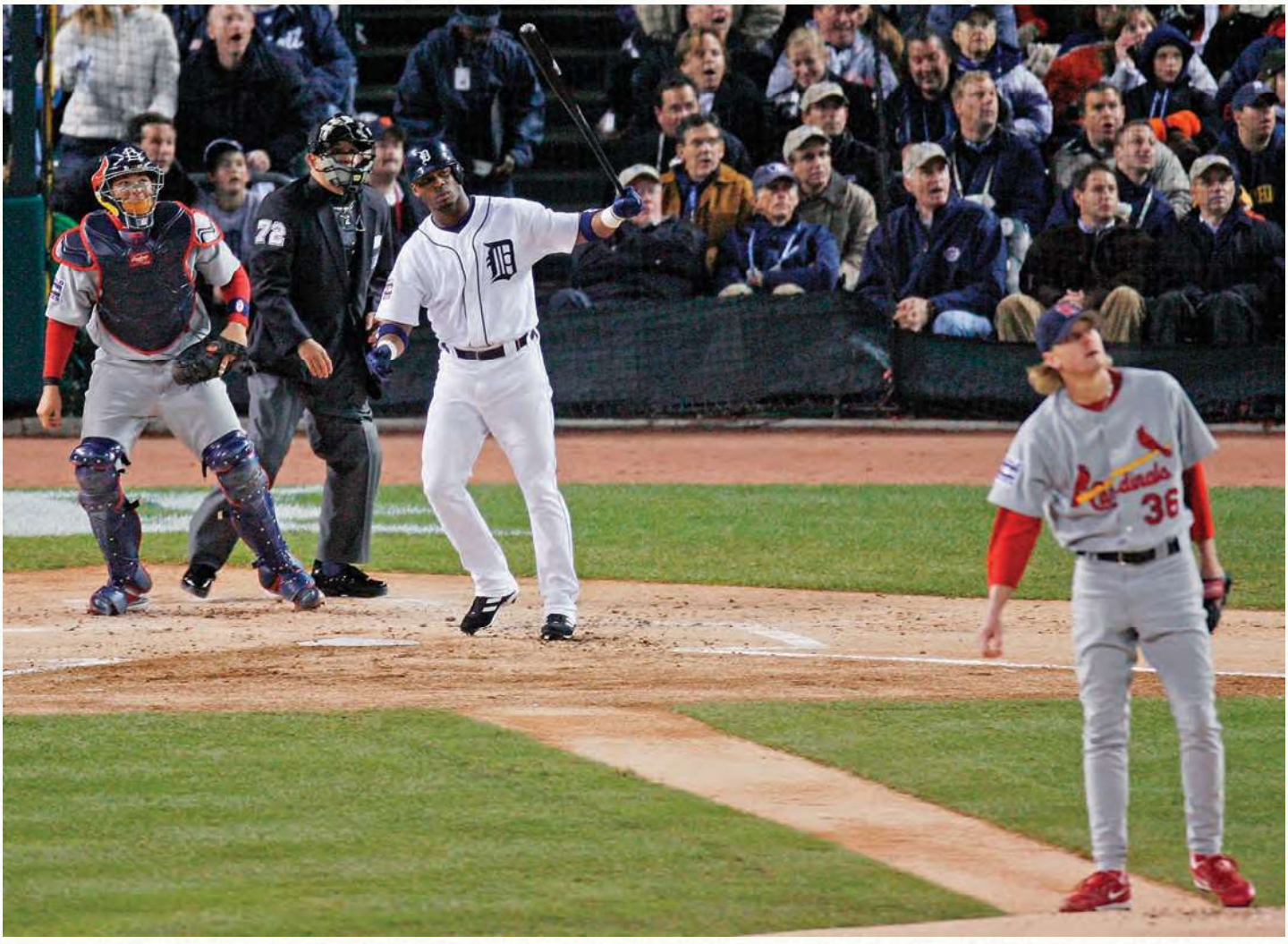
Cardinals
41

Cardinals
15

GAME 2: OCTOBER 22

St. Louis Cardinals	1	W Kenny Rogers (3-0) L Jeff Weaver (2-2) S Todd Jones (4)
Detroit Tigers	3	

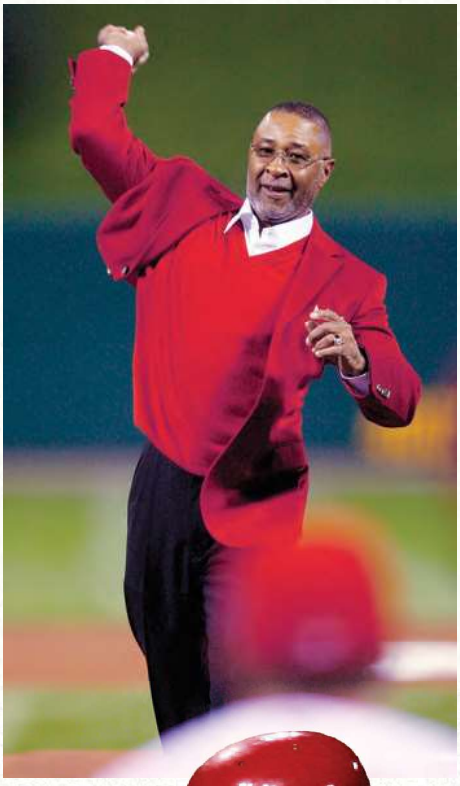




GAME 2: OCTOBER 22

GAME 3: OCTOBER 24

Detroit Tigers	0	W Chris Carpenter (3-1) L Nate Robertson (1-2)
St. Louis Cardinals	5	



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GAME 3: OCTOBER 24

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GAME 4: OCTOBER 26

Detroit Tigers	4	W Adam Wainwright (1-0) L Joel Zumaya (0-1)
St. Louis Cardinals	5	

GUILLEN
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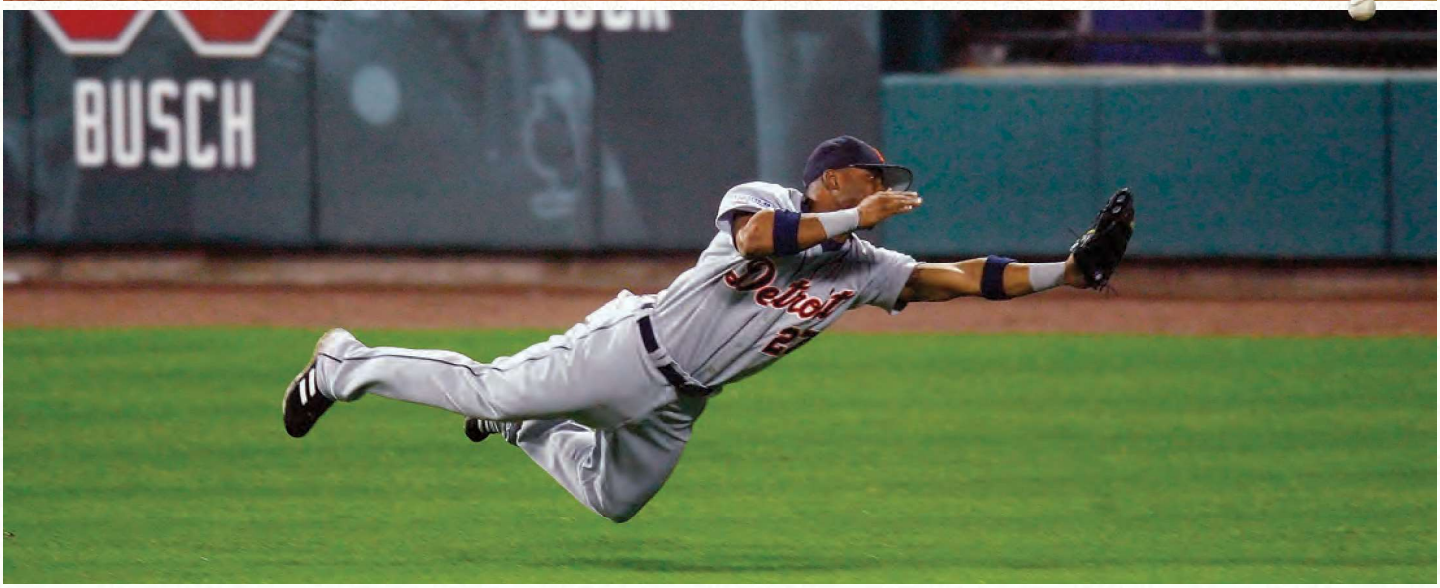
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GAME 4: OCTOBER 26

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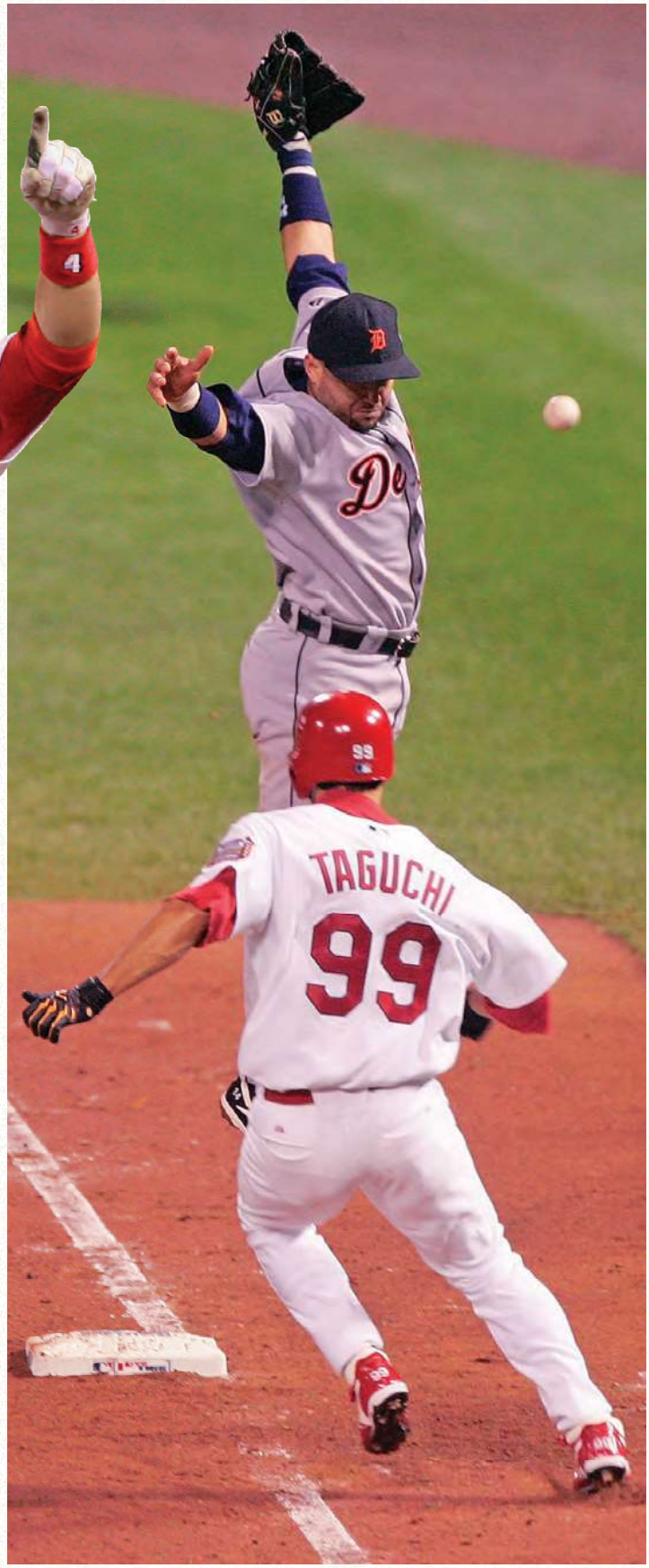
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GAME 5: OCTOBER 27

Detroit Tigers	2	W Jeff Weaver (3-2) L Justin Verlander (1-2) S Adam Wainwright (4)
St. Louis Cardinals	4	

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Cardinals
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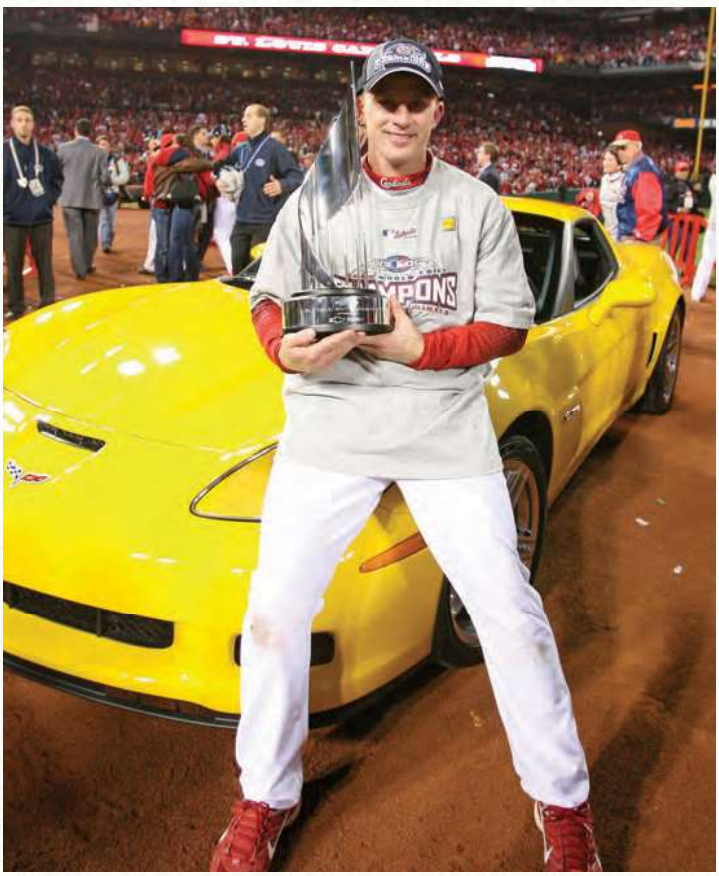
GAME 5: OCTOBER 27



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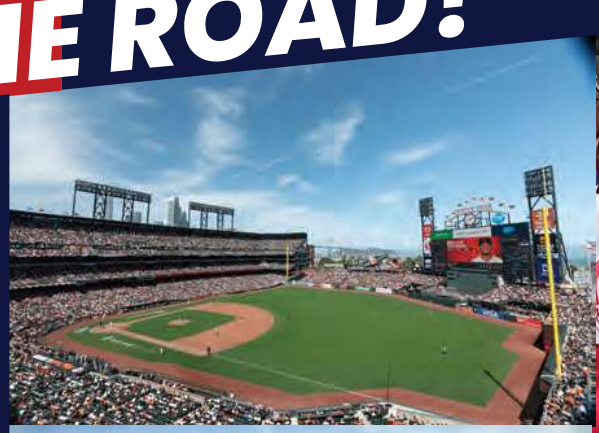

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THE FUTURE IS HERE

By Pete Croatto

The past and the present are linked in St. Louis. That is what 11 world championships, 19 National League pennants, and a lineup packed with legends will do. At shortstop, every Cardinal will be compared to Ozzie Smith, who not only became a superstar for his defense, but made it look like a Broadway dance routine on artificial turf.

When Masyn Winn, the Cards' 24-year-old star shortstop with the cannon arm and that small tornado of hair, evokes comparisons to the Wizard of Oz, it's more than the great nostalgia machine blowing smoke.

It is a sign that the future is here.

Everybody's Favorite Cardinal

Last season, in 127 starts, Winn made only three errors, tied for the least ever for a shortstop, in 501 chances. For most of the season, he led the league in outs above average, ultimately finishing tied for second in the majors with 21. Winn also tied for sixth in Fielding Run Value (FRV). He not only earned the Cardinals 100th Gold Glove — more than any other team — but was the youngest to do so at 23 years and 191 days.

Statistics don't fully tell how good Winn is. Brendan Donovan, the former Cards second baseman and 2022 Gold Glove winner, called Winn "the best defender I've ever seen."

"You can talk about the arm strength, the accuracy of his throws, the carry on his throws, the mental clock in his head, the instincts, the awareness to read swings and be in the right spots, the aggressiveness — his ability to do everything at a high level is incredibly impressive," Donovan said last August.

Then there is the kicker: "He's only getting better."

Those who don't bleed Cardinal red might argue that Winn lacked a large enough sample size at shortstop to win his first Gold Glove. He played a little more than 1,100 innings. It's not like last season was an aberration. In 2024, even while committing 18 errors, he was a finalist for the Gold Glove. Sports Info Solutions gave Winn a Fielding Bible Award that year. He was only the second rookie shortstop honored since 2006.

"In 2014, I played 110 games and won a Gold Glove," former Cardinals third baseman Nolan Arenado told MLB.com. "… If I can do it in 110, there's no reason why he doesn't deserve it in 120-something games. His defense has been unbelievable. He's just so steady and it's unbelievable to watch him."

With every diving stop and sizzling, palm-pounding throw, the young star summons the past while plotting a golden future.

Just ask his storied predecessor. "I don't think you can have a better young player to have around when you're rebuilding as the Cardinals are doing now," Smith said in spring training.

Then ask the spectators. "What's unique about Masyn Winn is he's different than what people think of when they think of Cardinals players — play the right way and serious. He's certainly not like that," says writer Will Leitch, a national correspondent for MLB.com and co-host of the Seeing Red podcast. But everybody likes him. "He is your kid's favorite player and he's your cranky uncle's favorite player."

The highlight plays are what fans remember and pump up the page views, but Winn knows what's behind his success. "Attention to detail. Every single ground ball, doing the fundamentals," he told Cardinals Insider earlier this year.

Smith, who won 13 Gold Gloves and made 15 All-Star teams on his way to the Baseball Hall of Fame, said the biggest similarity he sees between him and Winn is his work ethic. Winn played on a torn meniscus in his right knee for about three months in 2025, getting an injection during the All-Star break.

THE FUTURE IS HERE

"The attention to detail of locking into every pitch [defensively] is difficult to do, but [Winn] didn't give anything away," Cardinals manager Oliver Marmol said. "Hitters talk about not giving away any at-bats, but locking into every pitch is a real thing. He did a phenomenal job of taking pride in that. Even with the knee hurt, he was out there taking ground balls. With his approach and his routine, there was a lot of growth."

In September, he could no longer get by on grit and adrenaline. But before Winn flew to St. Louis for a second opinion, he cheered on his teammates in Milwaukee.

"I was hoping after having three days off that it'd feel a lot better," Winn said, according to MLB.com. "But it's really tough to swing and really tough to take ground balls. The training staff noticed [the knee injury]. I was trying to hide it a little bit, but I was in a lot of pain. And then we just made the executive decision to just shut it down."

Winn has had surgery and is ready to take the next step. So is everyone else.

"You get to see him grow," Leitch adds. "With the Cardinals organization, this is one of the things they're selling over the next few years: you are going to watch this young team improve. You're going to get to know these guys. Like any baseball team, they'll begin to feel like part of your family. Masyn Winn is perfect in that regard."

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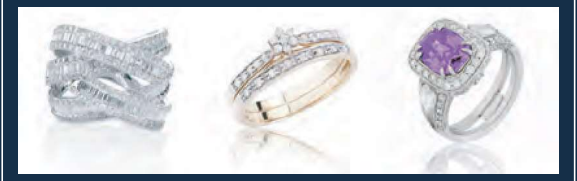

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'You Can See What He Can Be'

He was a top prospect in Memphis, the kind analysts talk about not in terms of if, but when. And the best part: there was not a trace of knucklehead in Masyn Winn's DNA.

"He's a hard worker, he wants it badly and he's got a lot of talent, but he also can help provide energy for the ballclub," Memphis Redbirds manager Ben Johnson told veteran sports reporter Rob Rains in 2023. "He's a vocal leader out there. He likes to direct traffic."

"You know he has tools. You know there's a high ceiling there, but he's a leader too. That's pretty cool for me to see. He's always the first one to the field every day; he's the first one in the cage. He loves the work and asks for extra work. He's a really good young man."

Winn was drafted by the Cards in the second round as a two-way player in 2020. He could always throw hard. Initially, from the infield, he was a disaster.

"Sophomore year in high school, I was throwing mid-90s," Winn told the Memphis Flyer in 2023. (He eventually hit 99 on the radar gun.) "I knew it was serious then. But I was a pitcher at the time, so didn't really consider what I could do from short."

Winn made 24 errors in 86 games in 2021, his first season in Class A ball. Most came from throws. Then, a Cardinals Hall of Famer intervened.

"Defensively, José Oquendo may be the best in the world," Winn said. "He told me that I don't have to show off my arm with every throw. I can go 80 or 85 percent and still make the play, then dial it up when I need to. Shortening up my motion and throwing like a shortstop."

After he won the Gold Glove, Winn credited Oquendo as the biggest professional influence.

"Since I got into the organization, that dude had been my defensive guy, just every single day," Winn told Cardinals Insider before the season started. "The dude knows everything. I try to be a sponge around that guy." Oquendo harped on footwork, breathing right — the little details that are the foundation of defense.

"It's great when I make a highlight play, but 90 percent of my plays are going to be the fundamentals right at me," Winn said.

He has not sacrificed his biggest attribute.

"Winn's excellence is a testament to his throwing arm," says Mark Simon, head of editorial at Sports Info Solutions. "He has ranked among the league leaders for the velocity of his throws, the top 10% of which exceed 90 MPH (that stat via MLB). There are a lot of very good shortstops, but that arm allows him to make plays that other shortstops can't make."

MLB Network analyst Harold Reynolds, a Gold Glove second basemen with the Seattle Mariners, said Winn has been more judicious with unleashing the gas. The combination of hand-and-eye coordination to pick grounders and arm speed is unlike anything he has seen at shortstop. But, Simon believes, it's unlikely Winn will cultivate a mine of Gold Gloves like Smith, who won 11 in a row in St. Louis. Shortstop in the National League is stacked with defensive talent.

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THE FUTURE IS HERE

Hardware will not affect Winn's abilities or jeopardize his development.

"One of the nice things about where Masyn Winn is, is because his defense is so good you can take your time," Leitch explains. "You can see him make those steady improvements. Does he have to be a 25-home run hitter? No, I don't think he does." If he can become an average or slightly above average hitter, Leitch says, he's an All-Star. "When you have someone who is so good defensively, everything else is upside."

Smith became a fine hitter, but he was not known for his power — Game 5 of the 1985 NLCS withstanding. And early in his career, Smith was, at best, wobbly at the plate. In his first two seasons, with the San Diego Padres, he hit .258 and .211. By comparison, Winn hit .267 and .253 in 2024 and 2025, with 24 home runs over both seasons. Smith had 28 home runs – in 19 seasons.

Winn was not pleased with his year at the plate, but there is time to improve. He spent the offseason working at a baseball skills center with teammates Jordan Walker and Iván Herrera and top prospect JJ Wetherholt.

Leitch, a lifelong Cardinals fan, says Winn has more to work with than Smith did. "You see what he can be eventually." The present isn't too shabby, though.

"Winn is something they don't have anywhere else," Leitch says. "One thing you can always count on a team needing is an outstanding defensive shortstop. The Cardinals have that and a guy that's popular with the fanbase and, frankly, a fanbase that is looking for things to be excited about. There's no negativity about Winn."

Once in a Generation

The more glorious the past was, the more we forget about the beginning.

It wasn't as if Smith came to St. Louis without the burden of ancestry. A bevy of fine Cards shortstops preceded him, including Dick Groat, runner-up for the 1963 National League Most Valuable Player, and "Mr. Shortstop," Marty Marion, a defensive dynamo who won the 1944 NL MVP and was part of three world champions.

In fact, Smith was basically traded from San Diego for one straight up: Garry Templeton, the swaggering, speedy, sweet switch-hitting All-Star.

Smith endeared himself to Cards fans less than a year after that December 1981 trade. The team won the World Series in 1982. Smith's impact as a defensive whiz sparkled. "When a guy takes two hits away from the opposition a game," legendary Cardinals manager Whitey Herzog told the Associated Press, "why isn't he as important as a guy who drives in runs?"

With Smith patrolling the left side of the infield, the team returned to the World Series in 1985 and 1987. Thirty years after his final game, Ozzie Smith remains an ambassador for the Cardinals.

Winn hears about him every day. "He's the man," admits Winn. But it's safe to assume Missouri Little Leaguers will be clamoring for number zero, if they haven't already.

"The caliber of player he is, the type of ceiling he has — even the floor — it's a really special player," Cards pitcher Michael McGreevy, who has played with Winn at various levels, observed last summer. "He's the type of player who comes along once in a generation."

A team does not win because of memories. Nostalgia does not get fans out of their seats. Masyn Winn is ready to be the Cardinal now that you tell your grandkids about.

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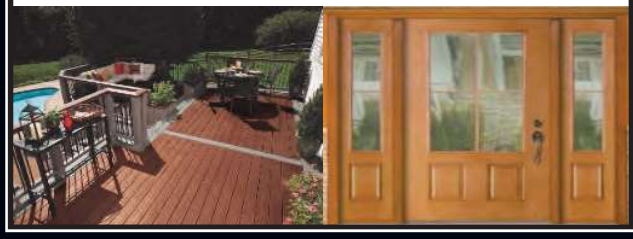

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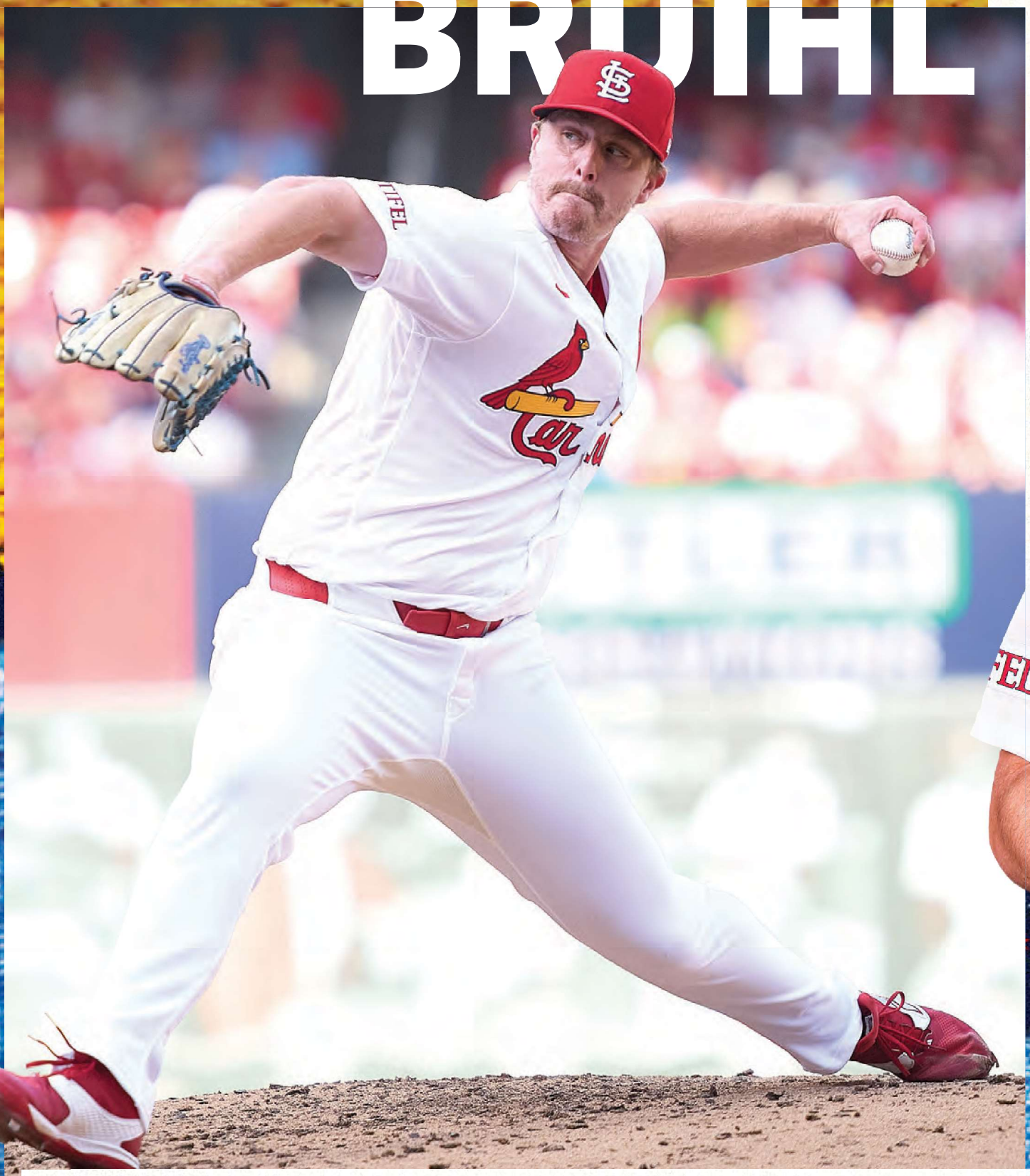

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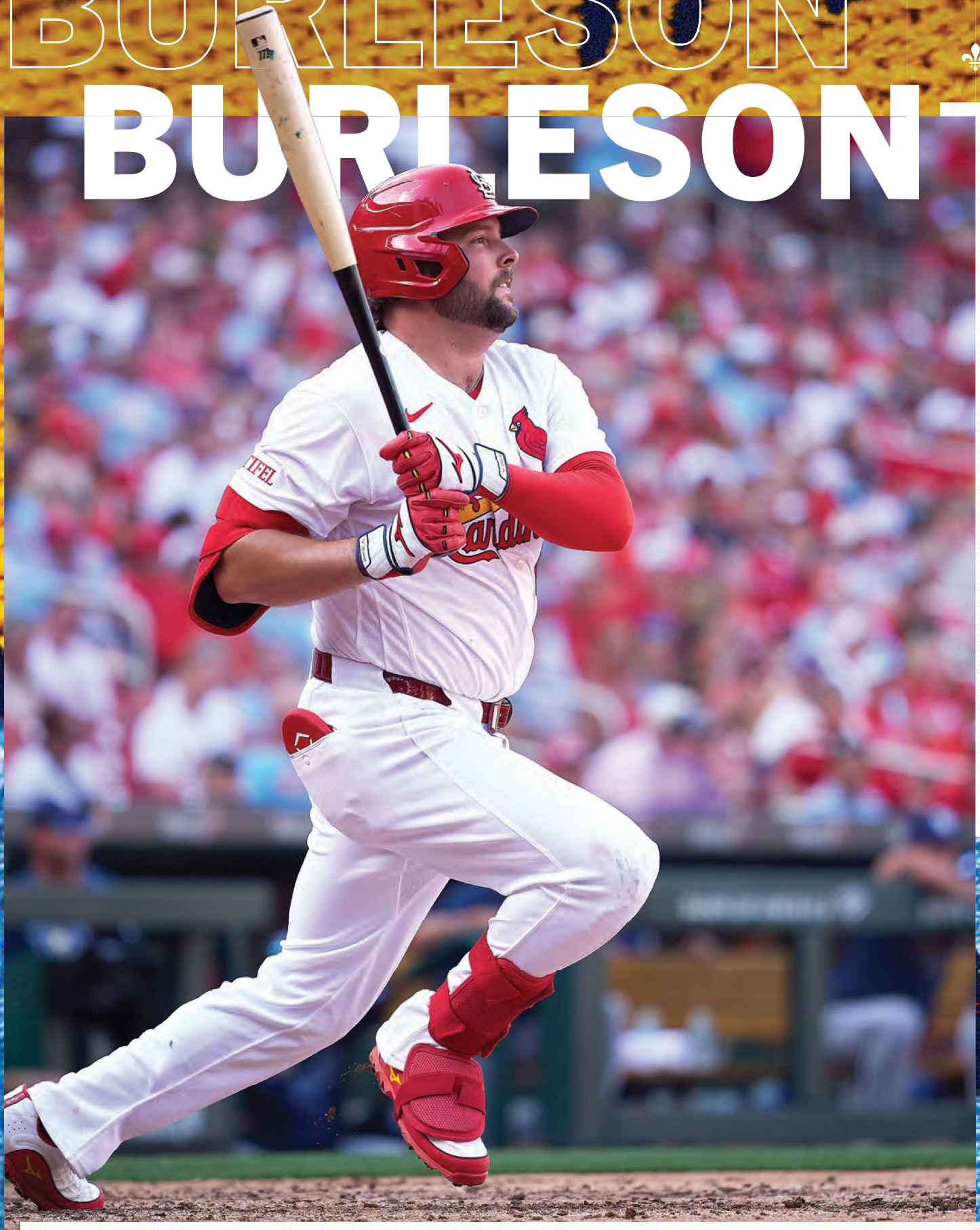


EST. 1882

41

ALEC

BURLESON

INFIELDER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-0	230
B/T	**AGE**
L/L	27
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
11/25/1998	Charlotte, NC

CHURCH

EST. 1882

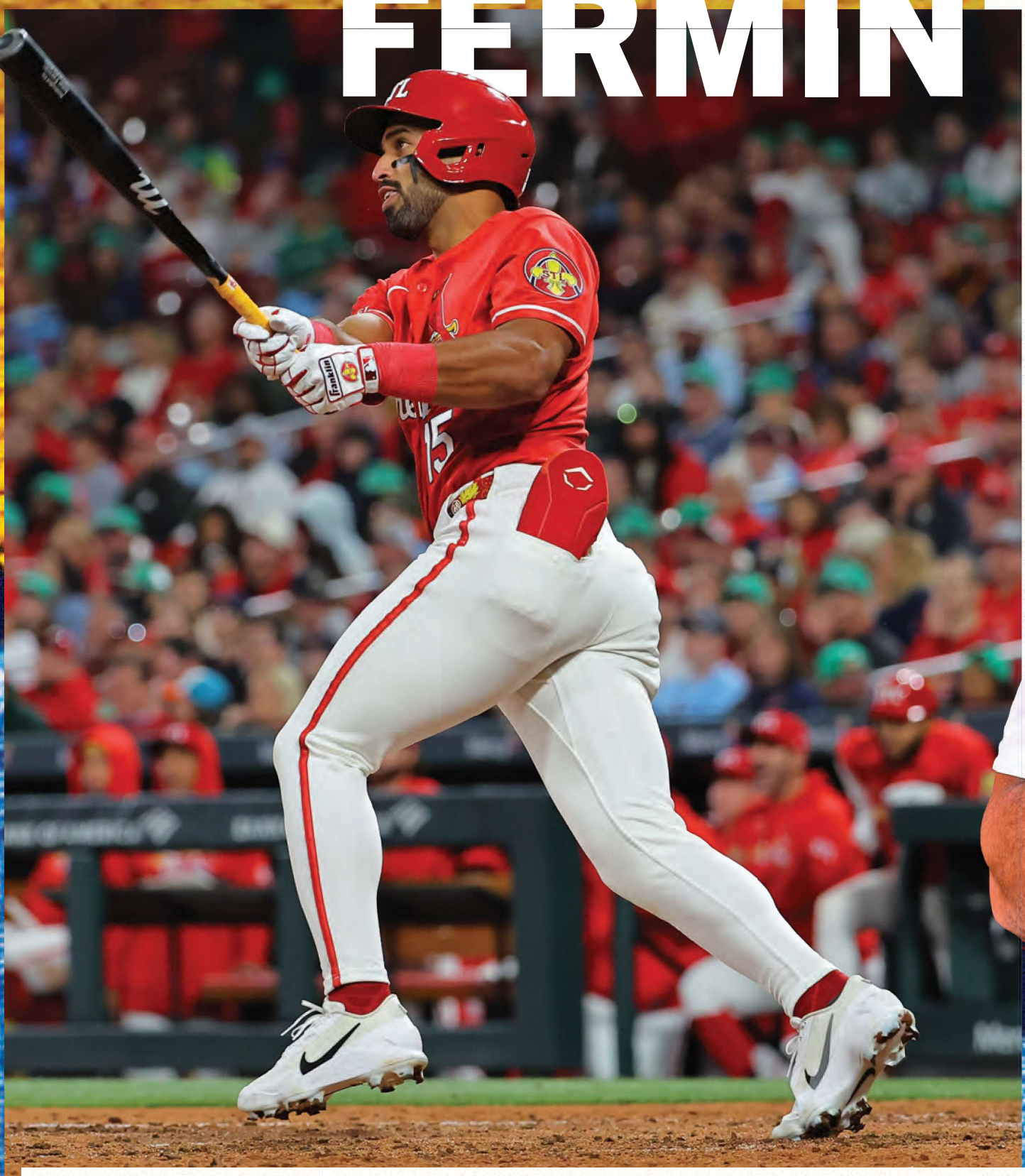
27

NATHAN CHURCH

OUTFIELDER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
5-10	200
B/T	**AGE**
L/L	25
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
7/12/2000	Newport Beach, CA

FERMÍN



EST. 1882

15

JOSÉ
FERMÍN

OUTFIELDER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
5-10	200
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	27
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
3/29/1999	Puerto Plata, DR

GORMAN

EST. 1882

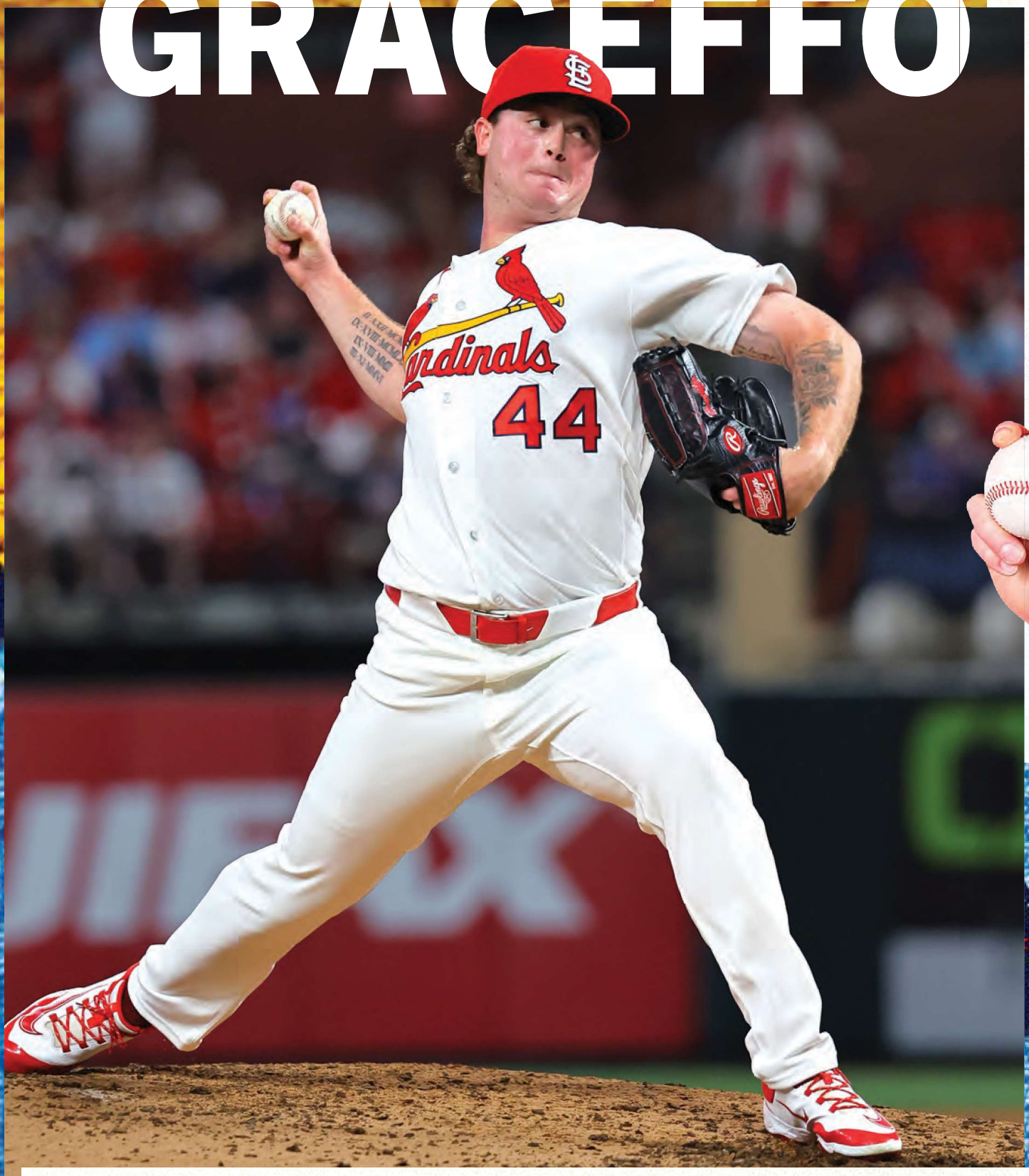
16

NOLAN GORMAN

INFIELDER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-0	225
B/T	**AGE**
L/R	26
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
5/10/2000	Phoenix, AZ

GRACEFFO



EST. 1882

44

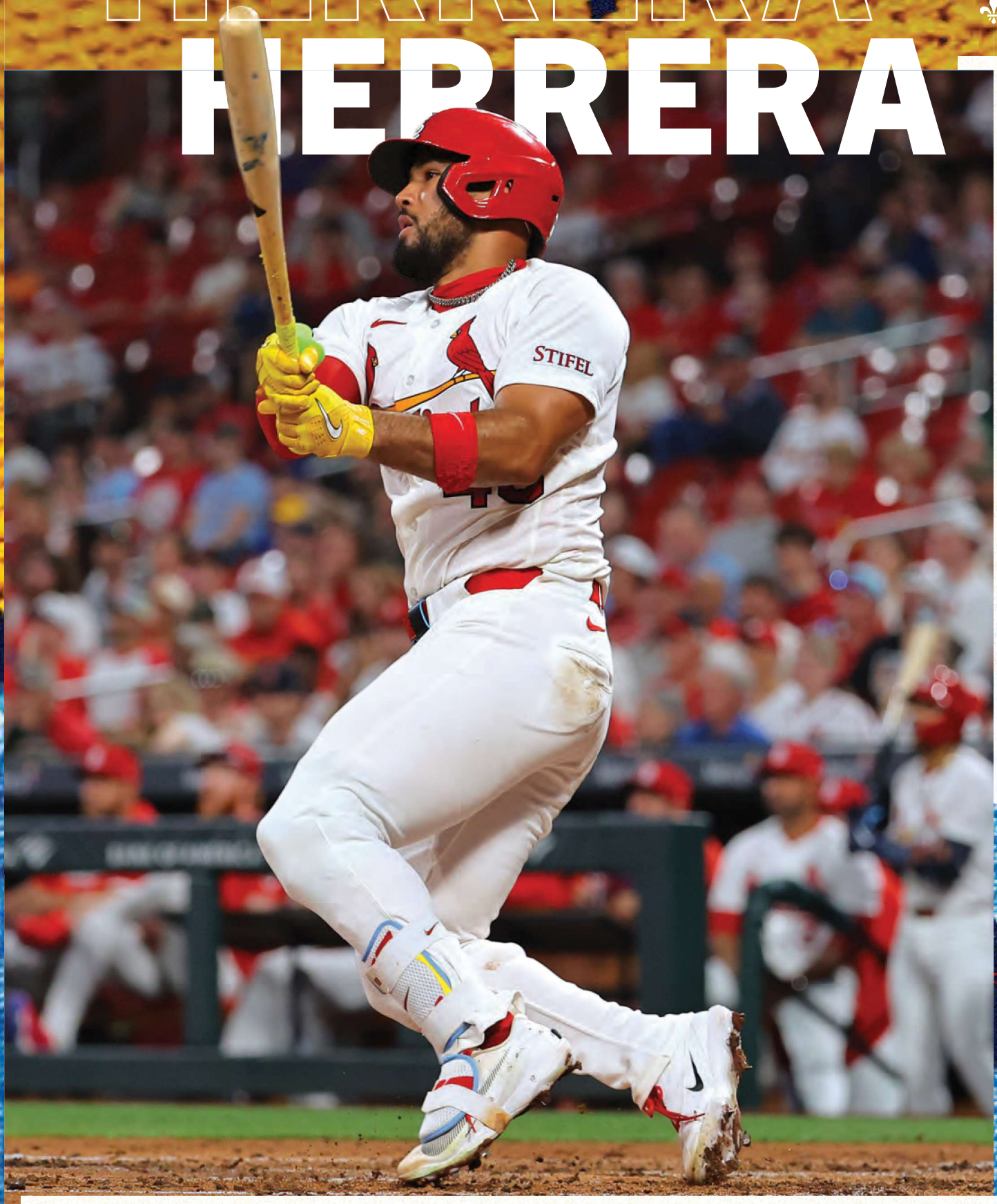
GORDON

GRACEFFO

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-2	235
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	26
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
3/17/2000	Cranford, NJ

HERRERA



EST 1882

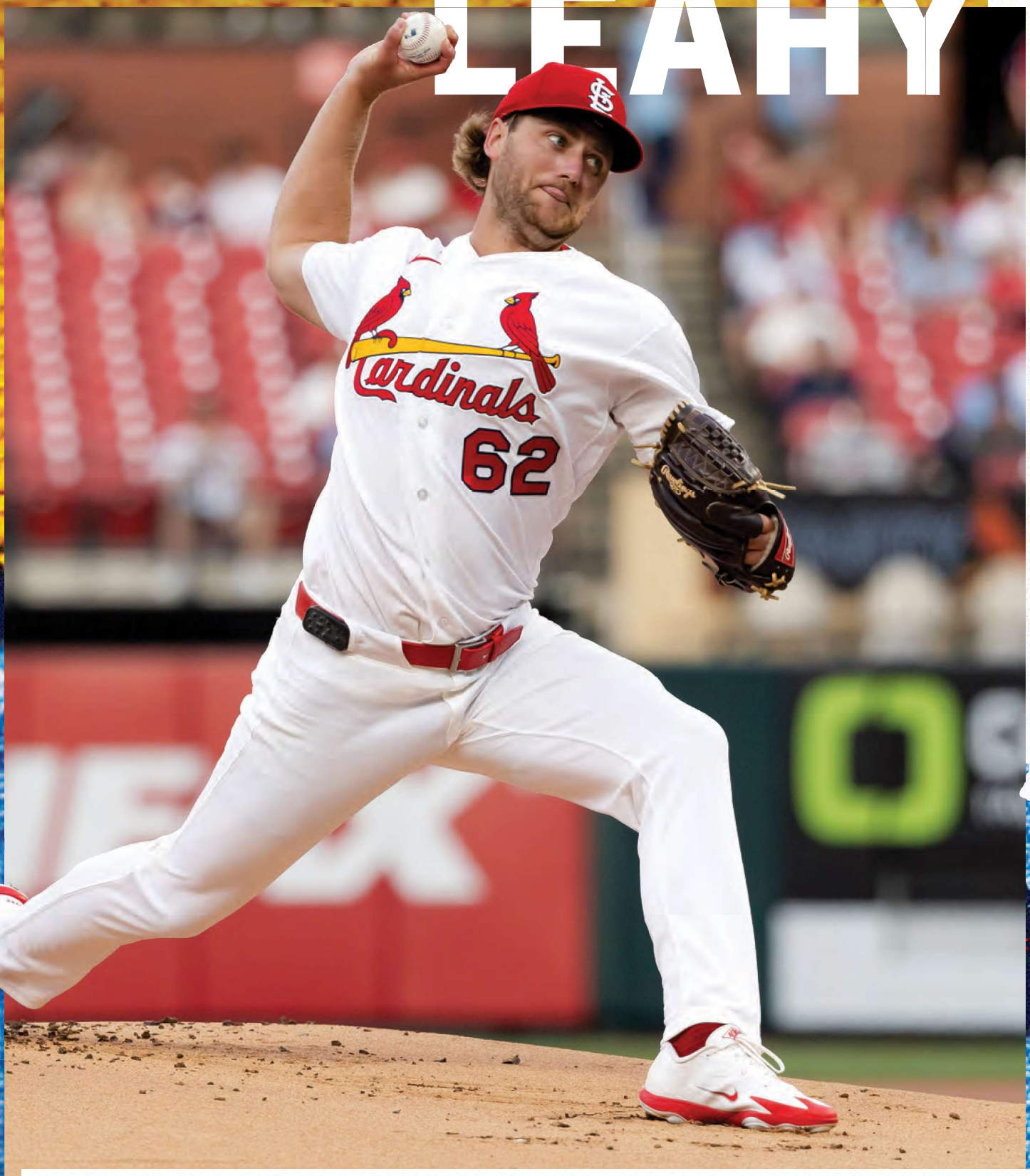
48

IVÁN HERRERA

CATCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-0	225
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	25
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
6/1/2000	Panama City, Panama

LEAHY



EST 1882

62

KYLE
LEAHY

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-4	225
B/T	**AGE**
S/R	28
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
6/4/1997	Longmont, CO

LIBERATORE

EST 1882

32

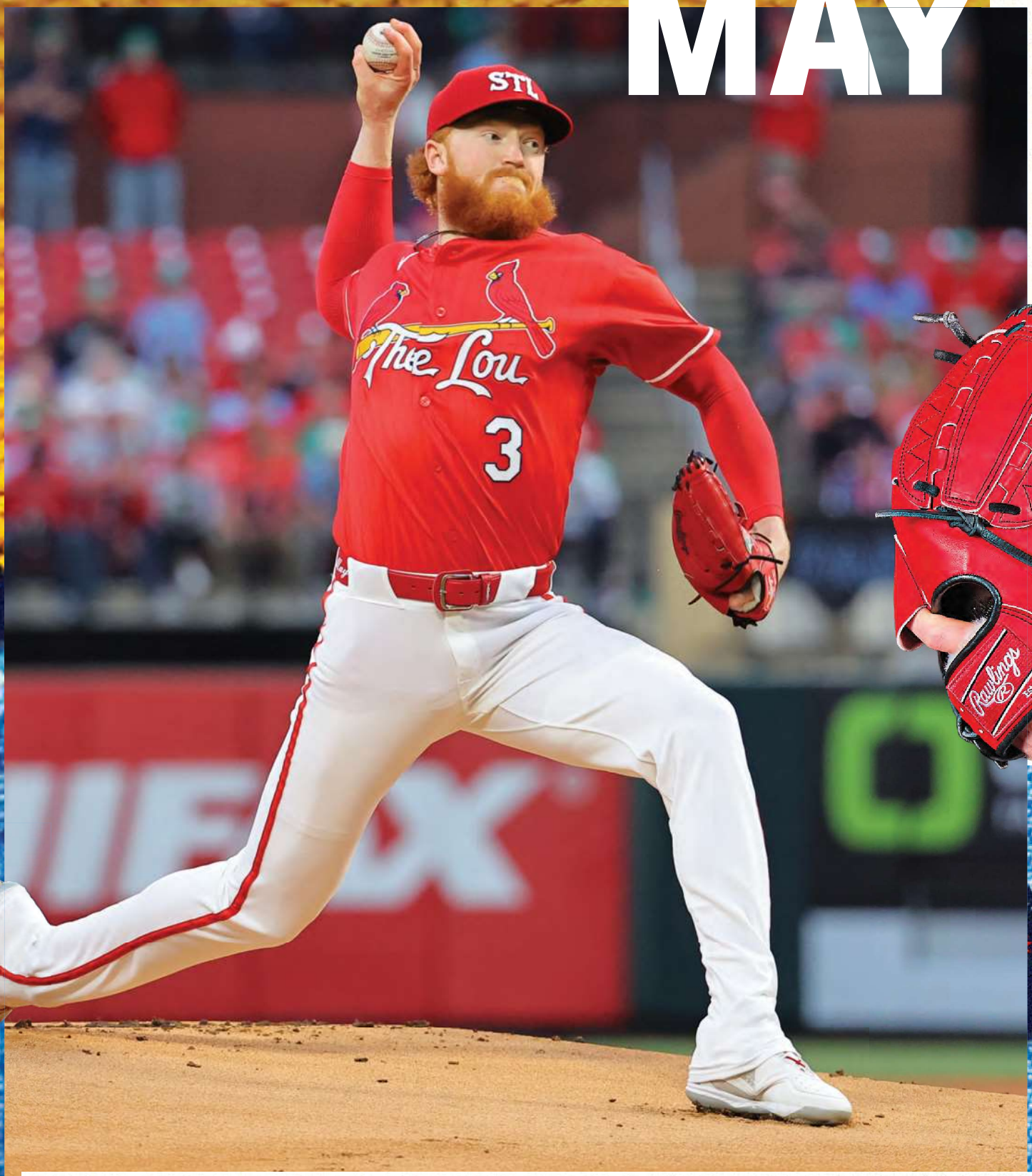
MATTHEW

LIBERATORE

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-5	220
B/T	**AGE**
L/L	26
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
11/6/1999	Peoria, AZ

MAY



EST 1882

3

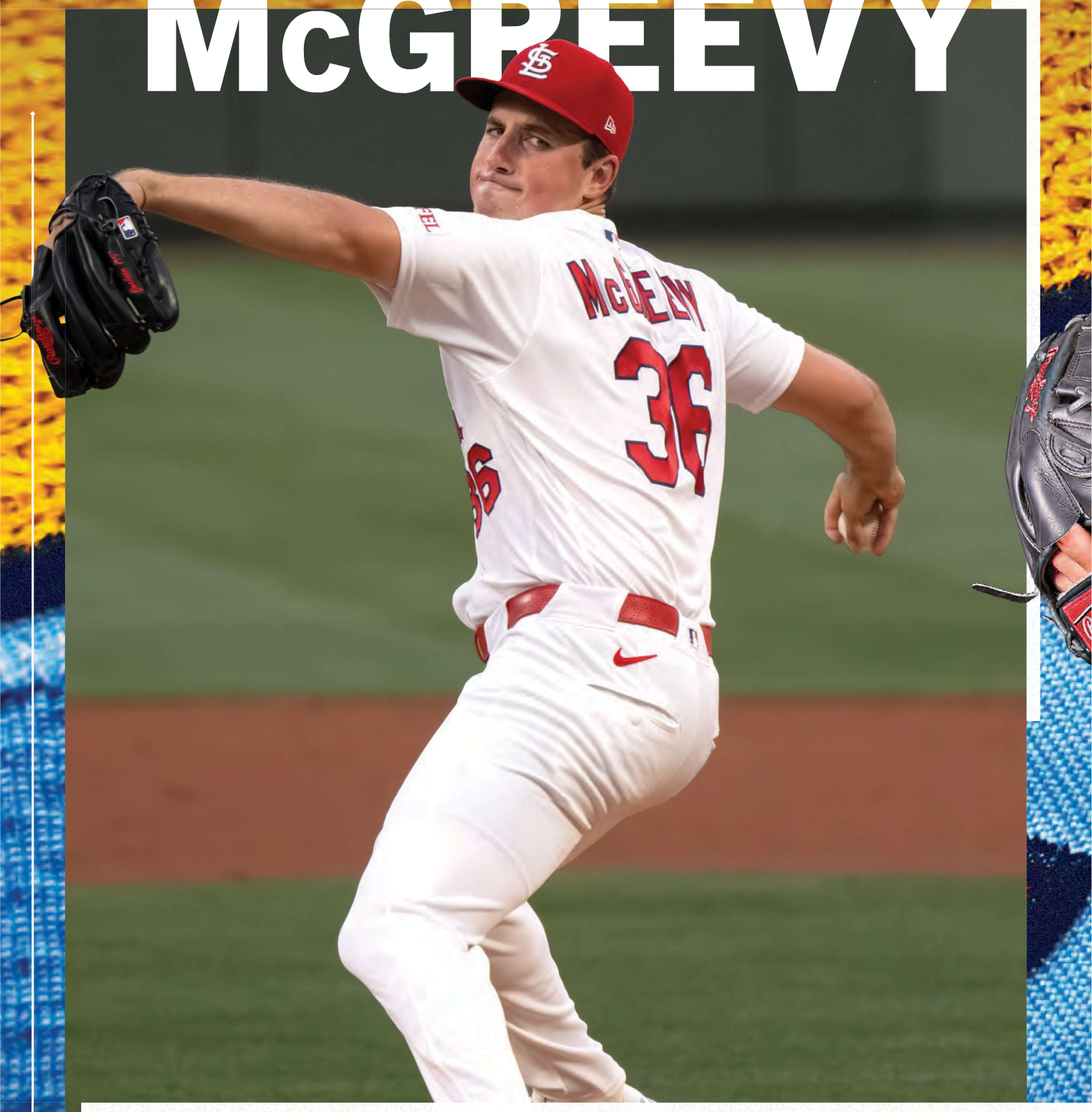
DUSTIN MAY

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-6	215
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	28
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
9/6/1997	Justin, TX

McGREEVY

McGREEVY



36

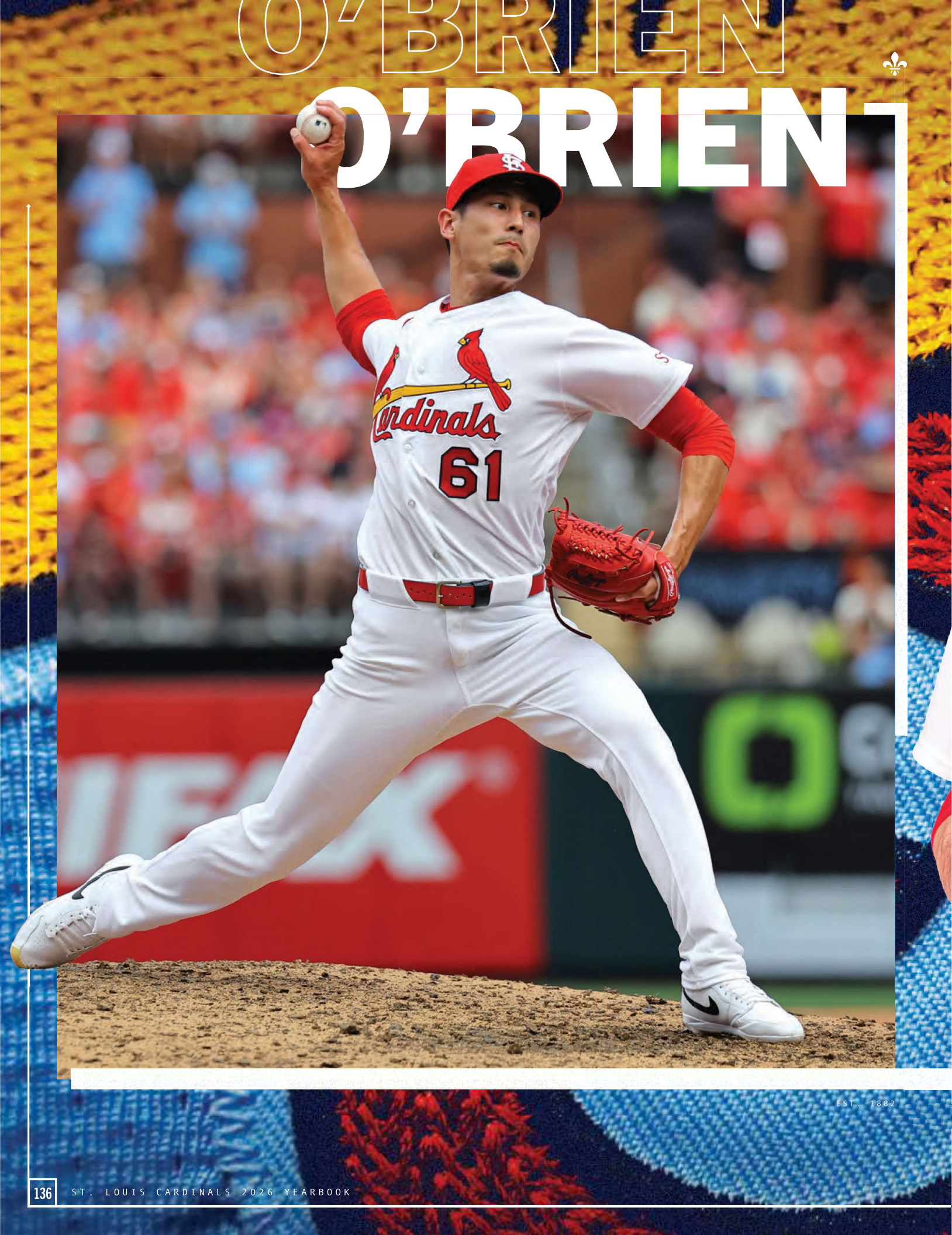
MICHAEL

McGREEVY

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-4	230
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	25
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
7/8/2000	San Clemente, CA

O'BRIEN



EST. 1882

61

RILEY
O'BRIEN

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-3	185
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	31
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
2/6/1995	Seattle, WA

PAGES

EST. 1882

43

PEDRO

PAGÉS

CATCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-0	250
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	27
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
9/17/1998	Maracay, Venezuela

PALLANTE

EST. 1882

53

ANDRE PALLANTE

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-0	220
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	27
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
9/18/1998	Mission Viejo, CA

POZO

EST. 1882

63

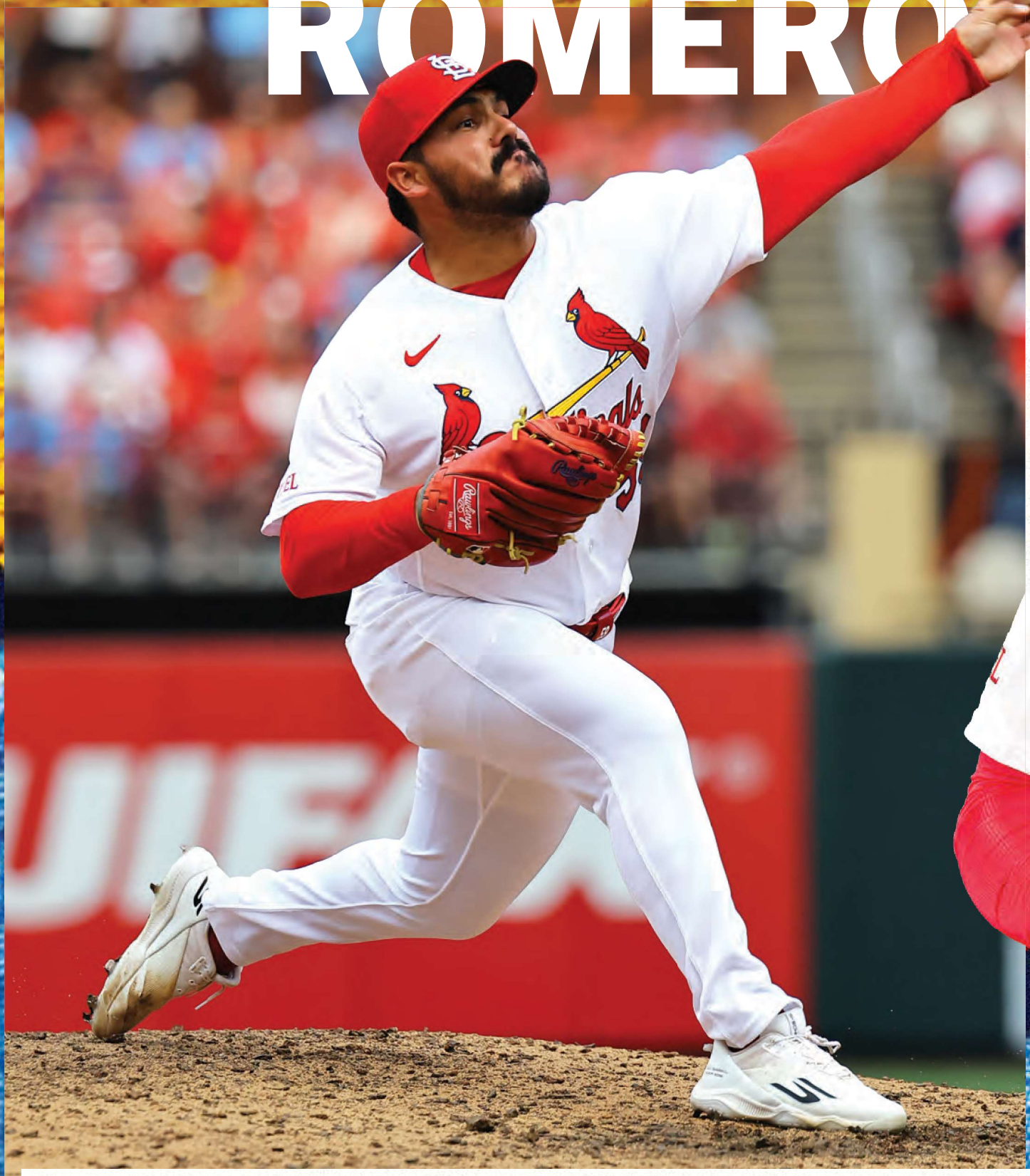
YOHEL

POZO

CATCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-0	245
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	28
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
6/14/1997	Maracaibo, Venezuela

ROMERO



59

JoJo
ROMERO

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
5-11	215
B/T	**AGE**
L/L	29
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
9/9/1996	Camarillo, CA

ROYCROFT

EST. 1882

58

CHRIS

ROYCROFT

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-7	245
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	28
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
6/21/1997	Elmhurst, IL

SAGGESE

EST 1882

25

THOMAS
SAGGESE

INFIELDER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-0	190
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	24
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
4/10/2002	Carlsbad, CA

SCOTT II

EST. 1882

11

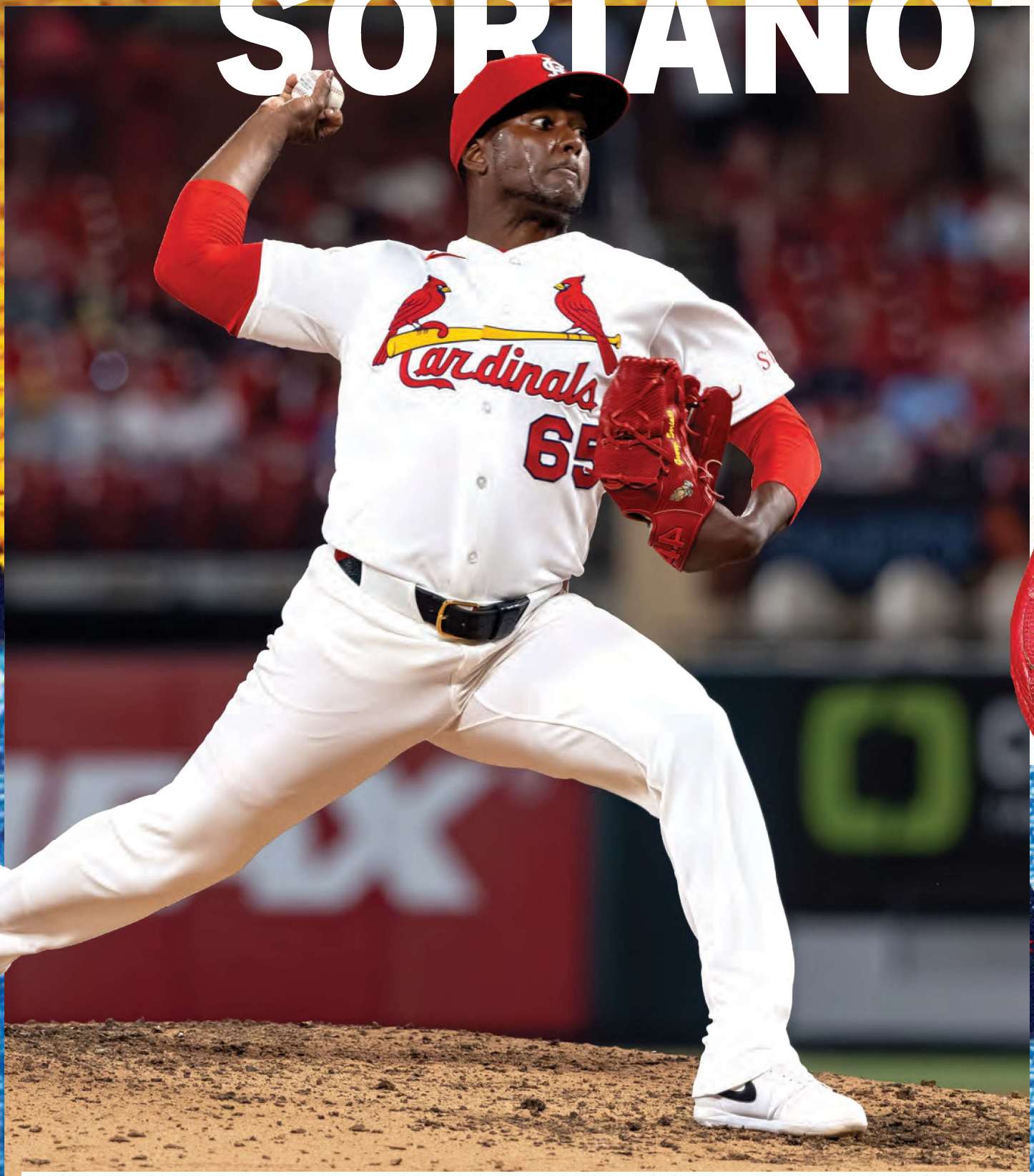
VICTOR

SCOTT II

OUTFIELDER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
5-10	190
B/T	**AGE**
L/L	25
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
2/12/2001	Atlanta, GA

SORIANO



EST 1882

65

GEORGE SORIANO

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-1	230
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	27
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
3/24/1999	San Pedro de Macorís, DR

STANEK

EST 1882

55

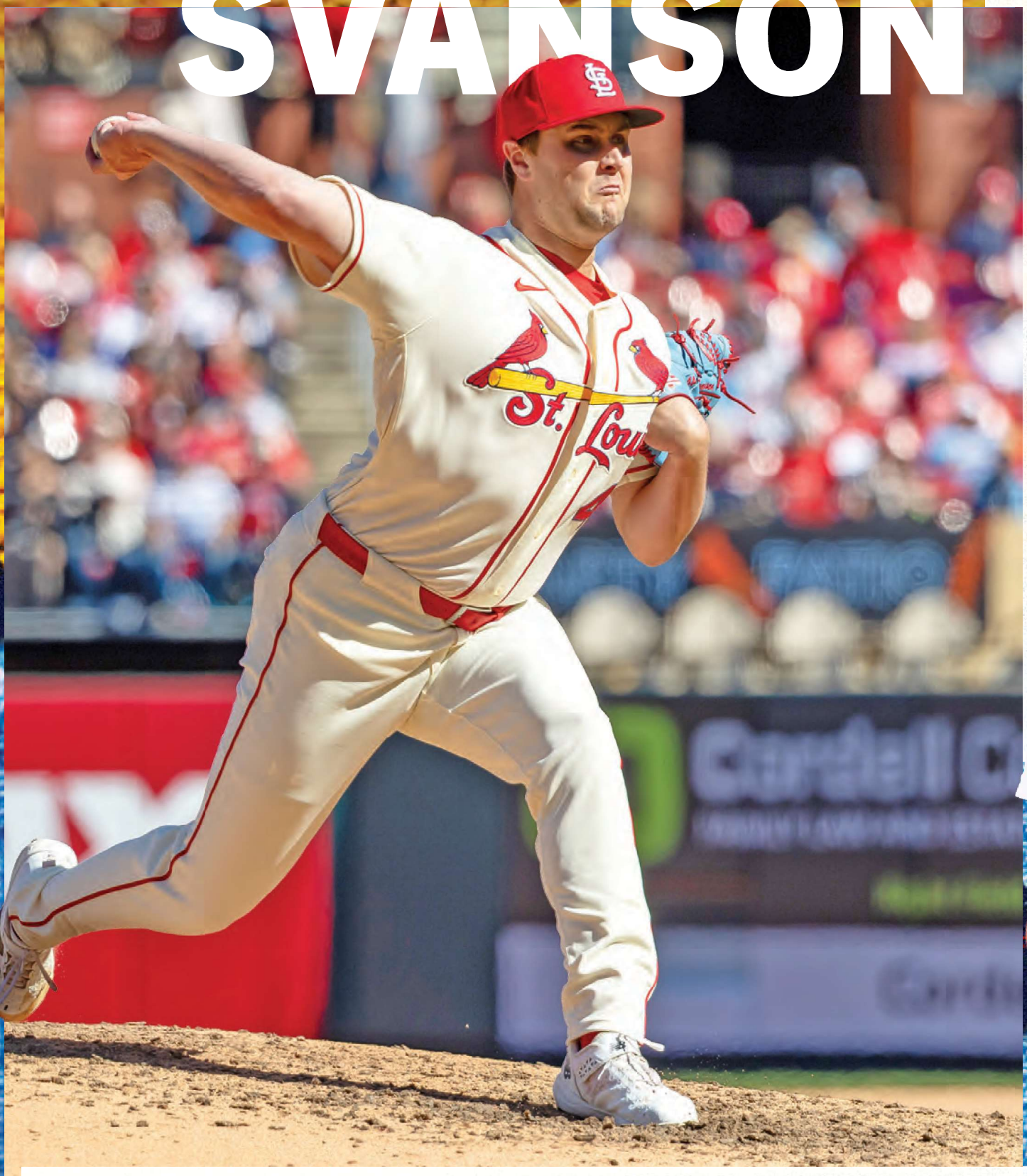
RYNE STANEK

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-3	235
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	34
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
7/26/1991	St. Louis, MO

SVANSON

SVANSON



EST 1882

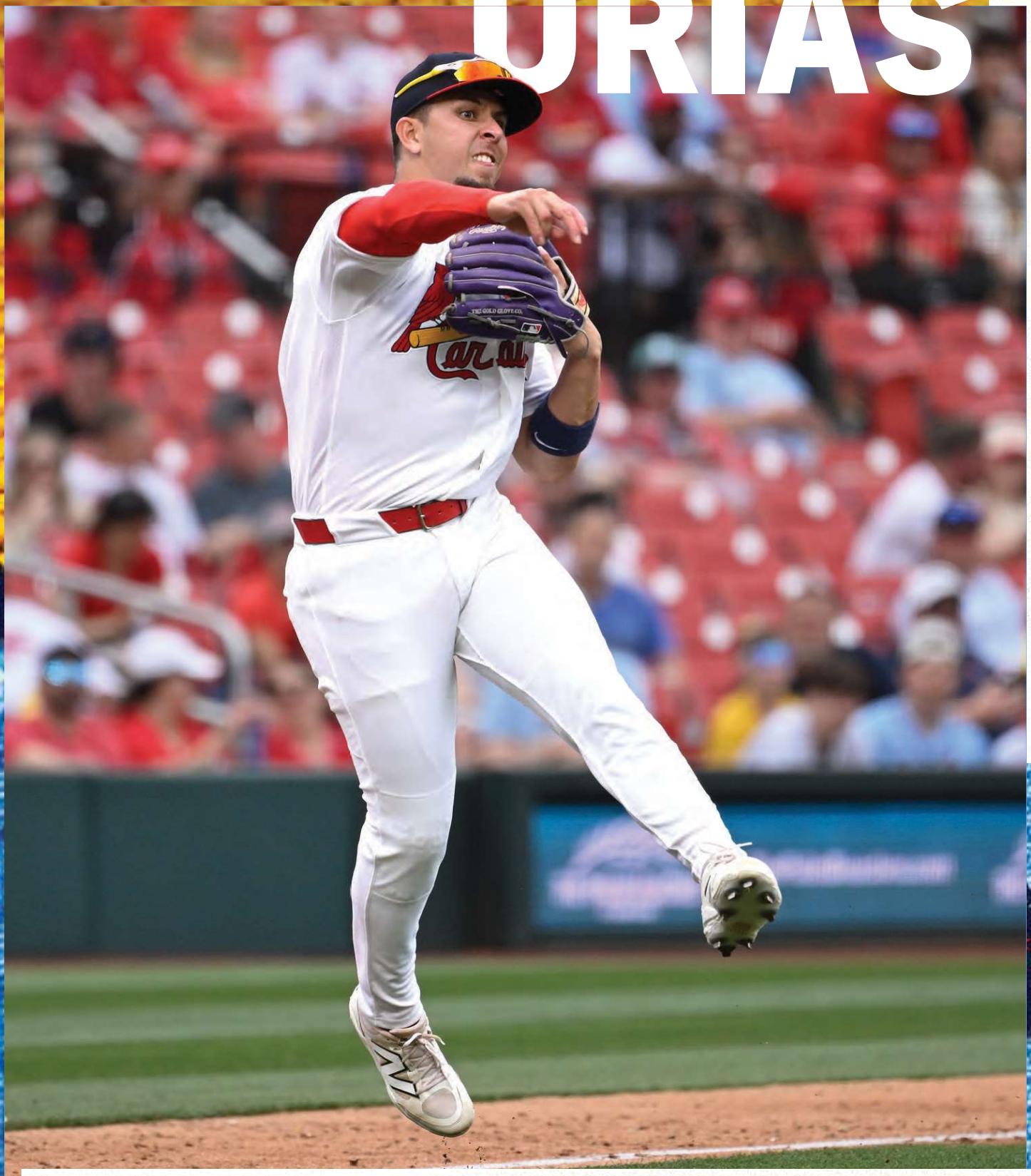
49

MATT SVANSON

PITCHER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-6	240
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	27
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
1/31/1999	Lake Zurich, IL

URÍAS



EST. 1882

29

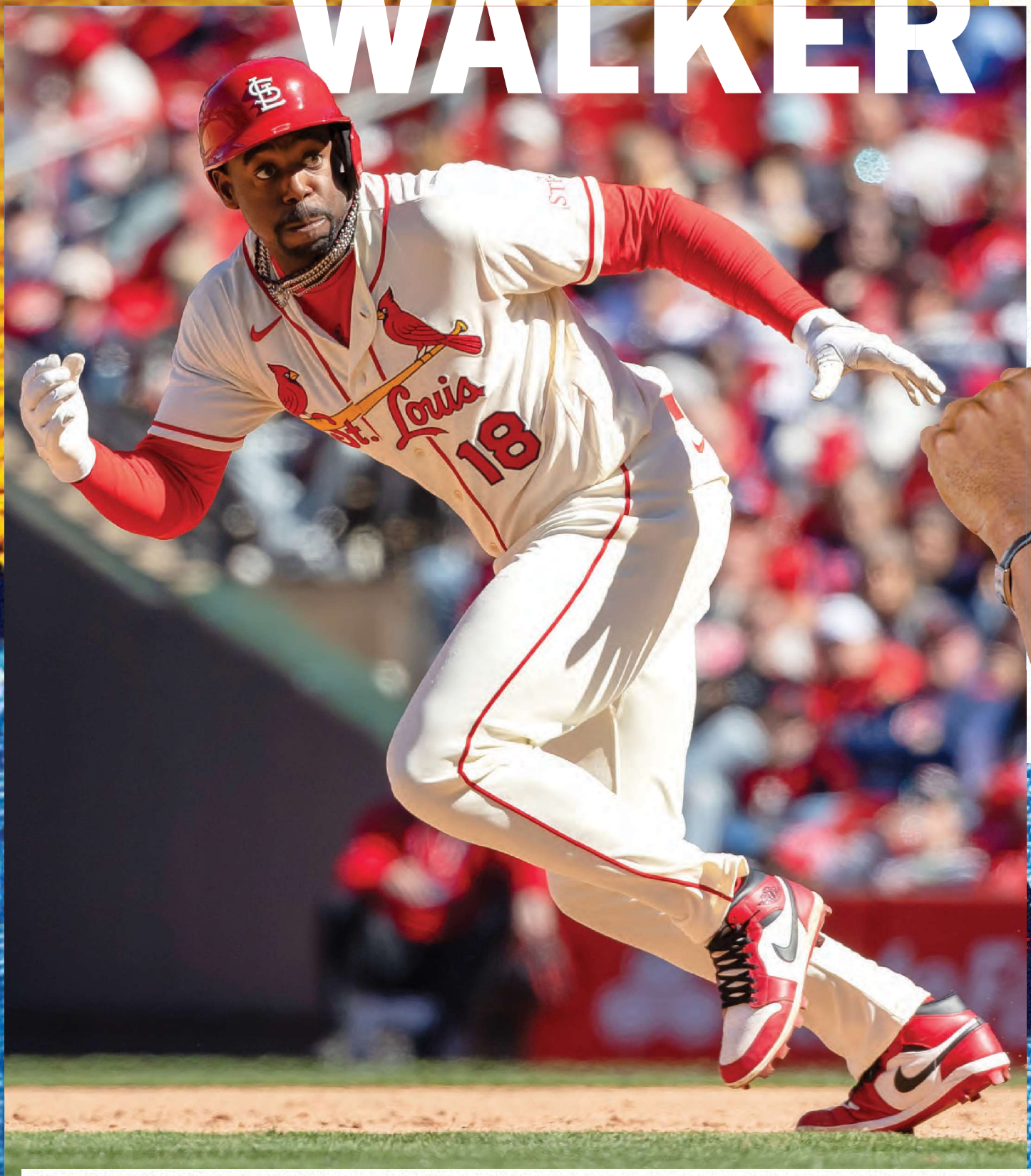
RAMÓN

URÍAS

INFIELDER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
5-9	185
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	31
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
6/3/1994	Magdalen de Kino, MEX

WALKER



EST 1882

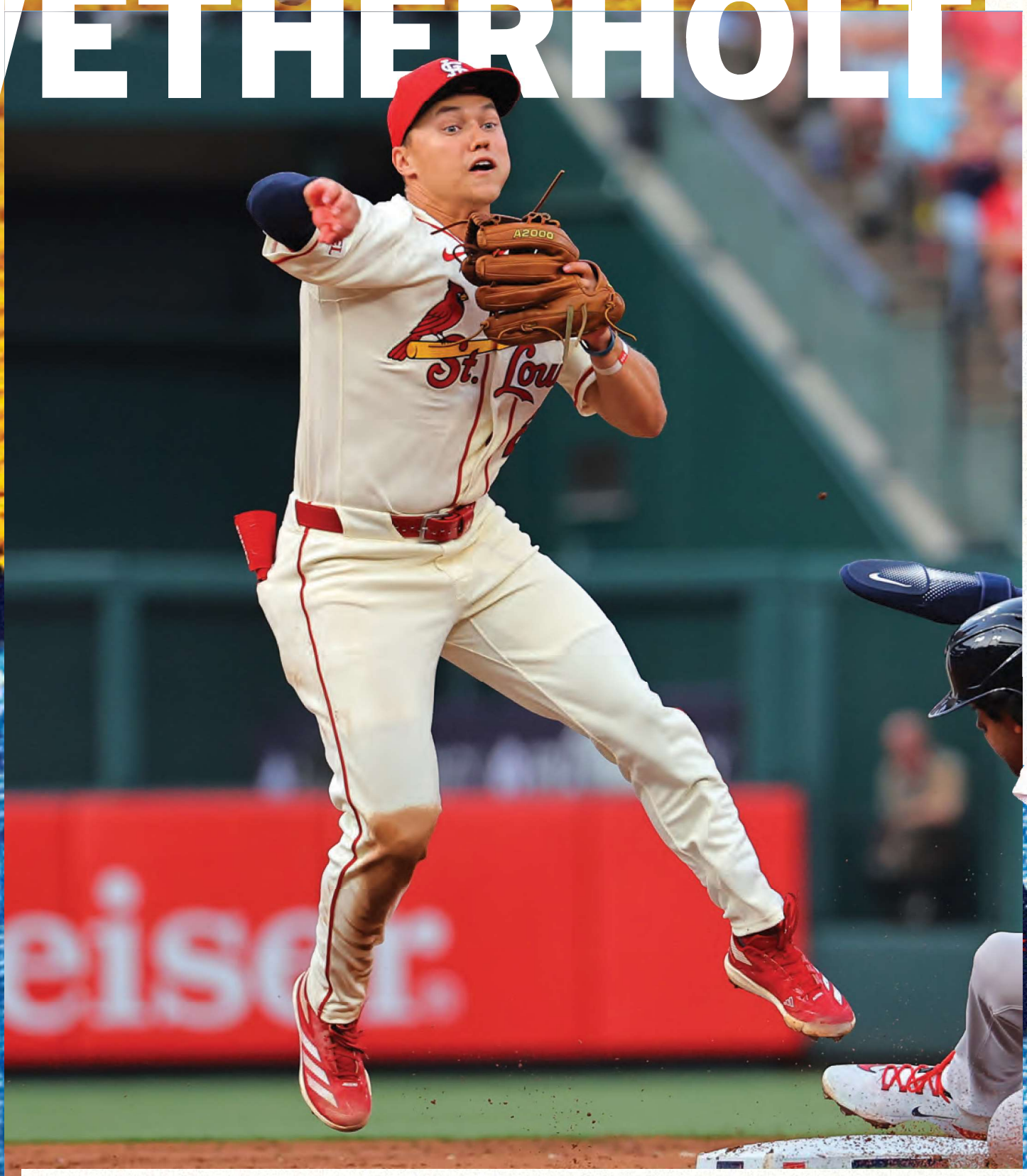
18

JORDAN WALKER

OUTFIELDER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
6-6	260
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	23
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
5/22/2002	Stone Mountain, GA

WETHERHOLT



EST. 1882

26

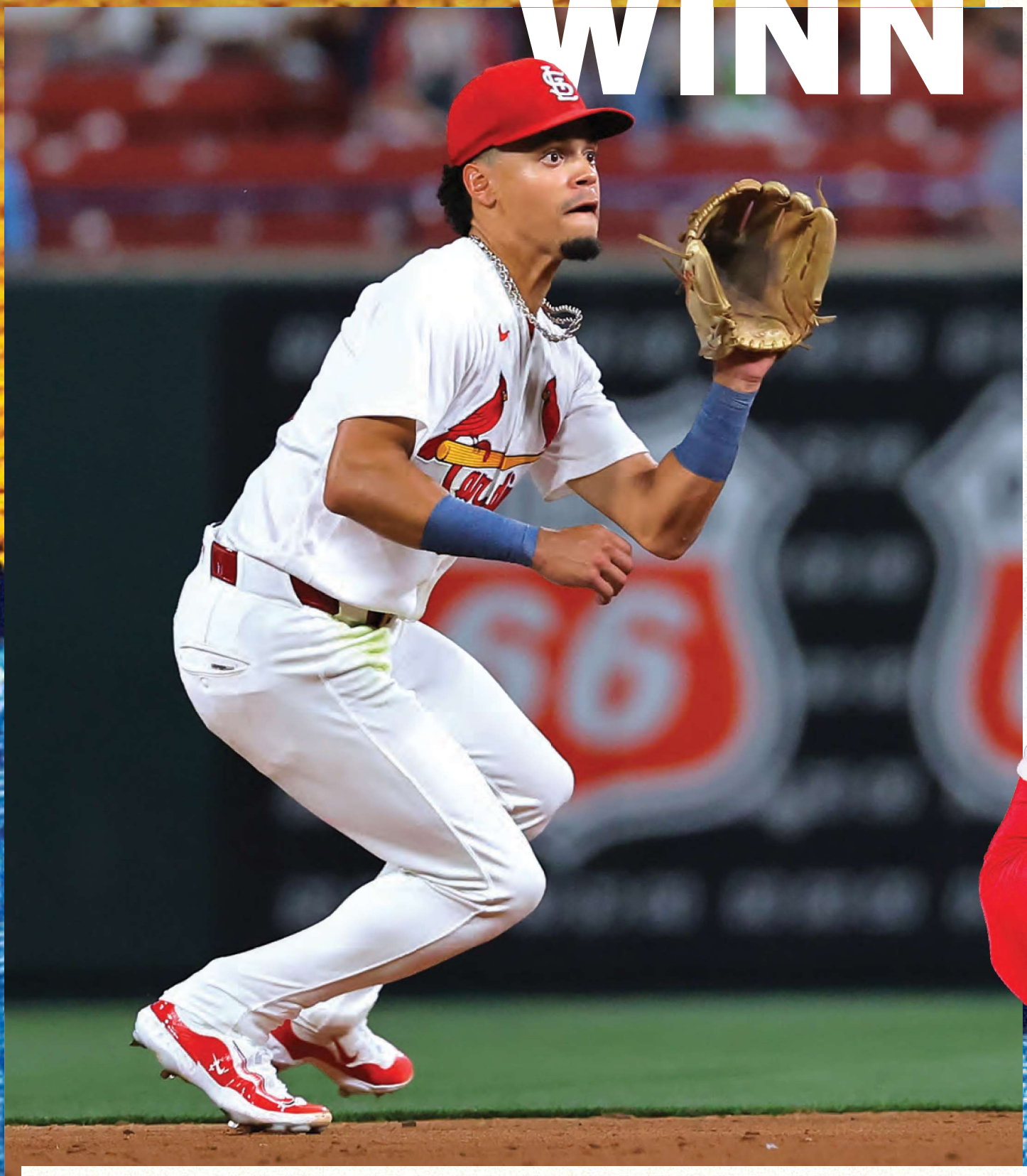
JJ

WETHERHOLT

INFIELDER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
5-10	195
B/T	**AGE**
L/R	23
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
9/10/2002	Baltimore, MD

WINN



EST 1882

0

MASYN WINN

INFIELDER

HEIGHT	WEIGHT
5-10	175
B/T	**AGE**
R/R	24
BIRTHDATE	**BIRTHPLACE**
3/21/2002	Katy, TX

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DUSTY BLAKE
Pitching Coach

BRANT BROWN
Hitting Coach

STUBBY CLAPP
First Base Coach

POP WARNER
Third Base Coach

JON JAY
Outfield, Baserunning & Quality Control

JULIO RANGEL
Assistant Pitching/ Bullpen

KYLE DRISCOLL
Assistant Pitching

BRANDON ALLEN
Assistant Hitting

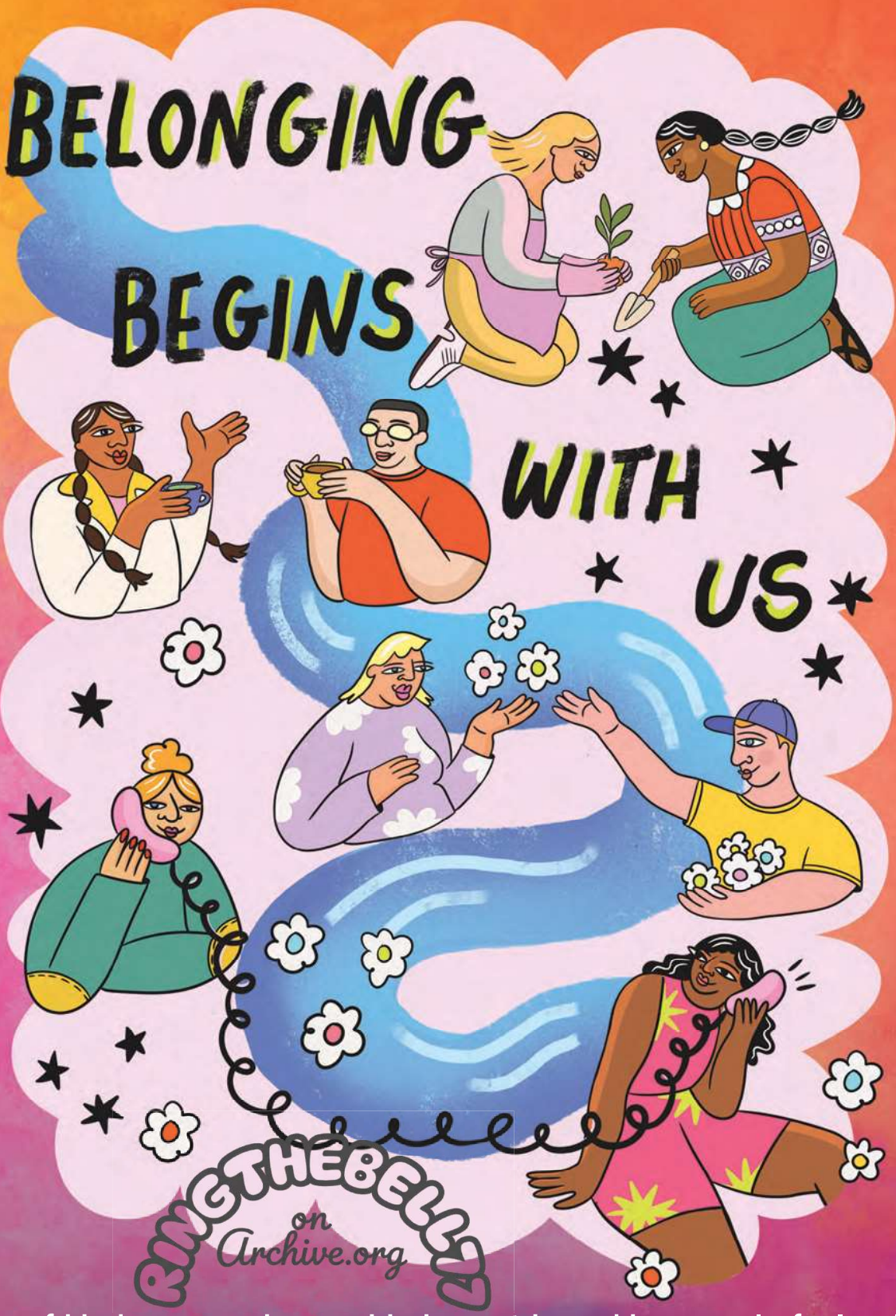
CASEY CHENOWETH
Assistant Hitting

JAMIE POGUE
Assistant/Bullpen

KLEININGER TERAN
Bullpen Catcher/Spanish Translator

PATRICK ELKINS
Offensive stategist

DEAN KIEKHEFER
Pitching strategist



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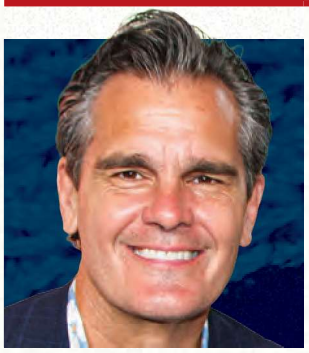

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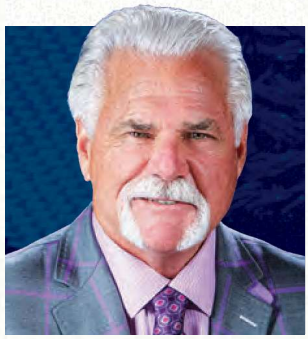
Cardinals.TV ◆ Analyst

MARK SWEENEY
Cardinals.TV ◆ Analyst

JIM HAYES
Cardinals.TV ◆ Reporter

DANI WEXELMAN
Cardinals.TV ◆ Reporter/Host

STEFAN CARAY
Cardinals.TV ◆ Play-by-Play



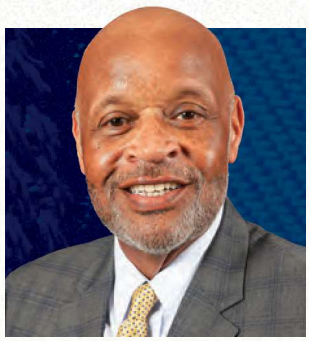
AL HRABOSKY
Cardinals.TV ◆ Studio Analyst

SCOTT WARMANN
Cardinals.TV ◆ Reporter/Host

CARDINALS RADIO NETWORK

JOHN ROONEY
Cardinals Radio

RICKY HORTON
Radio & Cardinals.TV



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